British minister starts Mideast tour

MUSCAT (AFP) — British Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett arrived here Wednesday at the start of a three-nation tour to brief the region on diplomatic efforts to defuse the Iraq crisis, his embassy said. Mr. Fatchett, minister of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs, was to hold talks with Omani leaders before heading for Abu Dhabi later the same day. "We were resolute in standing by our regional allies when Kuwait was invaded in 1990. [Iraqi President] Saddam [Hussein] is threatening Gulf security again," he said in a statement before his departure from Britain. "Our commitment to enforcing the international community's will is unwavering. Cooperation with our Gulf partners will play an essential part in bringing about the diplomatic solution we all want," said Mr. Fatchett, who is also to visit Egypt.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation

جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر باللغة الانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية ـ الرأي ـ

Mubarak warns of 'massacre'

CAIRO (R) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned on Wednesday of a "massacre" unless Iraq complies with United Nations resolutions allowing inspections of sites suspected to house weapons of mass destruction. "If Iraq does not implement Security Council resolutions there will be a massacre," he told reporters after meeting Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf. "I have talked to the Iraqi foreign minister and told him that the situation is dangerous, and it is important to implement Security Council resolutions to avoid a crisis." The U.S. commander in the Gulf on Wednesday said that the U.S. was ready to strike Iraq within a week or so. Mr. Mubarak also added there were no plans for an Arab summit on Iraq at this time and no specific Arab proposal to end the crisis.

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U.S. rejects Iraqi proposal, ready to strike in a week

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq on Wednesday outlined proposals aimed at ending the deadlock over U.N. arms inspections as the commander of U.S. forces in the Gulf said his troops could be ready for a military strike in a "week or so."

Gulf Arab states urged Iraq meanwhile to "lift all obstacles" to U.N. weapons inspections and warned Baghdad that it will be to blame if the crisis leads to U.S. military action.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan was to discuss the crisis with ambassadors of the Security Council's five permanent members — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

In Cairo, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf outlined proposals aimed at ending the crisis sparked by Iraq's refusal to open eight presidential palaces to members of the U.N Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarmament.

"We will open all these sites to a special team designated by the secretary general of the United Nations and made up of experts from the five permanent members of the Security Council and the 21 countries in the Special Commission [UNSCOM]," he said.

He said UNSCOM chairman Richard Butler, vilified by Baghdad, could serve as number two to a chairman of the special committee to be appointed by Mr. Annan.

Mr. Sahhaf, in a slight easing of the Iraqi position, also said it would be up to the special committee to determine the length of time it needs to inspect presidential sites.

"We believe that one or two months is more than enough but this question will be left for the special committee of experts who will determine on the ground the necessary length of time," he told a news conference.

Iraq had previously insisted that inspections of presidential palaces be limited to one or two months while the United States has ruled out fixing any time frame for the U.N. weapons experts to complete their work.

But Mr. Sahhaf reiterated Iraqi insistence that a date be set for an end to the U.N. inspections, a demand rejected previously by the United States.

"The inspectors could visit a site once, twice or 10 times but they must wrap up their work during a determined time frame," Mr. Sahhaf said after more than two hours of talks here with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa.

"The special committee can take samples which will be examined in UNSCOM labs," he said, adding that members of UNSCOM "would continue their work" in other non-presidential sites.

Russian ultranationalist leader and member of the Russian parliament Vladimir Zhirinovsky, talks to the press at his arrival at Baghdad's Saddam Airport on Wednesday. Mr. Zhirinovsky is in Iraq as a gesture of support to the Iraqi regime in its standoff with the U.N. over allowing arms inspectors into presidential sites. On the left is Iraqi Minister of Transport and Communications Ahmad Muratada (AP photo) (see story on page 12)

Mr. Sahhaf said opening up the eight sites was at the core of a Russian-French initiative to solve the crisis.

France described the Iraqi offer as a "step forward."

"The Iraqis are referring to eight presidential sites, this is a step forward, this is progress," French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anne Gazeau-Secret said.

But the United States rejected the Iraqi proposals with White House spokesman Michael McCurry saying: "It is not up to Iraq to set the conditions for the inspections."

Britain on Wednesday also responded coolly to the offer.

"It is encouraging" but Iraq's suggestions "do not fulfil U.N. Security Council resolutions," said a Foreign Office spokesman.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair reiterated in parliament Wednesday that Britain was still seeking a diplomatic solution to the crisis but said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "should not be in any doubt, and neither should anybody else, that if we are forced to take military action to bring him back into compliance [with U.N. resolutions] we will do so."

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz denied U.S. charges that Iraq was setting any conditions.

"We are ready to discuss any matter in an open-minded way," he said in an interview with the U.S. television network CNN.

Mr. Aziz said Iraq was not laying down conditions by asking Mr. Annan to form a special team to inspect the presidential sites at the centre of a crisis in which Washington has threatened to take military action.

"We are not putting conditions. We are suggesting workable arrangements," said Mr. Aziz, in contrast to his warning in December that presidential sites would remain off-limits "forever" to arms inspectors.

But he reiterated that Iraq would not grant access to the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of its disarmament, although its inspectors could form part of the new team.

"The adversary should not be the judge," Mr. Aziz said, referring to past disputes with UNSCOM which he accused of spreading disinformation about the state of Iraq's disarmament.

In the face of the U.S. and British rejection of the latest Iraqi proposals to defuse the crisis, he did not rule out that Baghdad could be willing to improve the terms of access.

"More, I don't know. This is a very general word," he said.

But "the Americans and the British are refusing [Iraq's] ideas, those reasonable ideas, those balanced ideas, because they don't want a diplomatic solution," Mr. Aziz charged.

"They are sitting waiting for us, for the Russians, for the French, and for the others, to present ideas. And then they say, 'We don't like these ideas.' This is not an honest way to reach a diplomatic solution," he said.

The United States and Britain have threatened to carry out a military attack against Iraq unless it allows arms inspectors unlimited access.

U.S. General Anthony Zinni, commander of U.S. Central Command which covers the Gulf, said Wednesday that his forces would need only about a week to be fully ready for an attack on Iraq if diplomacy fails to resolve the crisis.

"We are ready but we have a few more pieces to put in," he told reporters who accompanied U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen on a visit to the aircraft carrier USS George Washington.

"I would say we are within a week or so" of being totally ready, the Marine Corps general said. Gen. Zinni said he would be "nervous" if he were now in Mr. Hussein's place.

Apart from the George Washington, the United States has a second carrier, the USS Independence, as well as 11 other warships and more than 320 aircraft in the Gulf region.

Mr. Cohen, wrapping up a tour of Gulf allies, told sailors aboard the ship that the U.S. did not "want to resort to war unless it is absolutely necessary."

He said Tuesday that the United States would have "the strong support" of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which groups Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The leading power in the GCC, Saudi Arabia, has opposed the use of its territory — where the United States has more than 100 combat planes — to launch attacks on Iraq.

GCC foreign ministers held an emergency meeting in Kuwait City on Wednesday and urged Iraq "to respond positively to all initiatives aimed at defusing the crisis with the United Nations over disarmament, for which it puts the entire responsibility on Iraq."

They accused Iraq of "continuing in its obstinacy despite all the initiatives undertaken by Arab and international parties."

Economic sanctions imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until UNSCOM certifies that its weapons of mass destruction have been destroyed.

Palestinians: U.S. proposal for West Bank pullback 'unrealistic'

Israel warns U.S. not to try to impose its ideas

Combined agency dispatches

THE PALESTINIANS have rejected a U.S. proposal for a limited Israeli troop pullback in the West Bank, the chief Palestinian negotiator said Wednesday after meeting with U.S. State Department officials in Washington.

"The percentages the Americans are proposing are unrealistic," the negotiator, Saeb Erekat, told the Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Mr. Erekat would not say how large a pullback his U.S. counterparts thought was reasonable. Among those participating in the meetings was Dennis Ross, the chief U.S. Mideast peace envoy.

Mr. Erekat said the Americans were getting ready to present their own proposal to break the year-long deadlock in the negotiations.

In the past, U.S. mediators had been reluctant to present their own ideas, saying they did not want to impose a solution. However, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is becoming increasingly impatient with the refusal of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to budge and make concessions.

Mr. Erekat said Israeli negotiators, who are also in Washington for separate talks with U.S. officials, have not offered the American peace team any new ideas.

"The Israelis came with nothing," Mr. Erekat said.

U.S. mediators hoped to set up direct talks Wednesday with Israeli and Palestinian delegations to try to advance prospects for ending the stalemate in the peace process, diplomats said.

A meeting was tentatively scheduled for 2:00 p.m. local time at the State Department but diplomatic sources said there was some doubt as to whether the trilateral talks would be held.

Meanwhile, Israel's chief negotiator has warned the United States not to try to impose on Israel its ideas for breaking the long deadlock in peace talks with the Palestinians.

"No one can impose something on Israel that is against its vital interests," Danny Naveh told Israel Radio from Washington when asked about reports that the United States was preparing an aggressive new push to bridge the huge gaps between Palestinians and Israelis.

"Only the involved parties can reach an agreement," Mr. Naveh said. Anyone wishing to advance the peace talks "can't do it by presenting ideas the sides won't accept."

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, arrived in Washington Tuesday and met with the State Department's coordinator for the peace process Dennis Ross.

The reported U.S. proposals would be for Israel to immediately begin carrying out a three- or four-stage withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank over a period of several weeks.

In return, after the first stage of the Israeli pullout, the Palestinians would have to answer several Israeli demands including the dismantling of anti-Israel groups, revision of a PLO Charter calling for Israel's destruction and full security cooperation with Israeli forces.

At the end of the pullbacks, Palestinians would have full control over 28 per cent of the West Bank and civilian authority in another 12 per cent, where the Israeli army would remain present.

Currently the PNA has exclusive control over only three per cent of the West Bank and partial rule in another 24 per cent.

Mr. Netanyahu's right-wing government has reportedly offered to cede less than 10 per cent of the West Bank at this time and that only after the Palestinians meet Israel's security demands.

UAE opens trade fair for first time in Baghdad, sends more aid

BAGHDAD (AFP) — More than 60 private companies from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) opened a trade fair on Wednesday in the Iraqi capital, in the first such event by Gulf firms since the 1991 conflict over Kuwait.

Finance Minister Hikmat Mezban Ibrahim said after the opening that the exhibition amounted to "a challenge to the U.S. threats... and shows the solidarity [of the UAE] with the Iraqi people."

Among the goods on display were foodstuffs and medicine, household electrical goods and spare parts for cars, as well as construction materials and petrochemical products.

The Dubai ports authority and the Jabal Ali free trade zone were also represented at the fair, which is due to run 10 days.

In Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, the Red Crescent Association said it would continue sending relief aid to Iraq despite the U.S. threats to attack the sanctions-bit country because of the crisis over U.N. arms inspections.

It was to send food, medicine, and milk to Iraq to help "its children and elderly people who are suffering from tragic living conditions" because of the sanctions in force since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The aid has been financed through donations of around $2.3 million, the association's chairman, Khalifa Nasser Al Suweidi, told the official UAE news agency WAM.

The aid, which has in the past been sent by ship, was ordered by the minister of state for foreign affairs, Sheikh Hamdan Ben Zayed Al Nahayan, whose country has repeatedly called for a lifting of sanctions.

Iraqi troops were evicted from Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf war.

Israel lifts quotas on Palestinian workers

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel announced Wednesday that it was lifting restrictions on the number of Palestinians authorised to work in Israel.

"We are putting an end to the policy of quotas, from now on the number of Palestinians working in Israel will be determined only by the demand from employers," said General Yaacov Orr, coordinator of Israeli activities in the occupied territories.

Gen. Orr said during a press conference for foreign journalists that Israelis wishing to hire Palestinians would simply submit requests to local employment offices.

He said one aim of the change in policy was to encourage employers to hire Palestinians rather than foreign immigrant workers whose presence is causing growing social problems in the Jewish state.

"Israel prefers Palestinian to foreign workers and we intend to diminish gradually the number of foreign workers in the country," he said.

The general said a recent downturn in Israeli economic community had depressed the demand for Palestinian and foreign workers and so it was difficult to estimate the number of potential jobs for residents of the occupied territories.

"Everything depends on the employers, the number could be 40,000, 50,000 or 100,000, it depends on their needs," he said.

Currently around 50,000 Palestinians have permits to work in Israel, half the number in 1990 before Israel began restricting access to its territory due to bombings and other attacks by Palestinian groups.

As part of the new Israeli policy of trying to make Palestinian workers more attractive to Israeli employers, the army has also decided to permit 5,000 selected workers from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank remain at their workplaces in Israel throughout the week.

Previously all Palestinian workers had to return home at night, excluding them from around-the-clock construction projects and jobs requiring frequent overtime or night-time work.

To benefit from the eased restrictions, Palestinians must be at least 28 years old, married and have already worked in Israel for at least three years.

Employers must provide adequate housing and name a foreman to ensure the Arabs remain at the worksite.

Gen. Orr said the defence ministry had also decided to take "a calculated risk" and provide special security clearances for 30,000 Palestinians who will be allowed to reach their jobs even during security closures of the occupied territories.

Previously following major attacks the army sealed the territories, barring all workers from entering Israel.

The closures have lasted anywhere from days to months, causing serious economic hardship for the Palestinians and disrupting work in many Israeli enterprises.

Gen. Orr said Israeli authorities were concerned about falling living standards in the Palestinian areas over the past four years, largely due to restrictions on the entry of Palestinian workers into Israel.

The economic hardship undermine support for the peace process while strengthening the influence of anti-Israel groups, notably Islamists who gain popular support by offering social services to poor families, he said.

Iraq air strikes not a just war, say bishops

LONDON (AFP) — Ten Anglican bishops have declared their opposition to military action against Iraq, arguing it would not be a "just war" if Britain and the United States launched air strikes against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

In an open letter to the British government, the bishops expressed their opposition to the use of military force because of the danger of large-scale civilian casualties, the Daily Telegraph reported on Wednesday.

They said it would be morally weak and would "reinforce the already deep Muslim mistrust of the West."

The bishops of Monmouth, Kingston, Bangor, Croydon, Aston, Manchester, St. German, Truro, Sheffield and Worcester signed the letter, which was handed out at the General Synod on Tuesday.

"We do not write from a pacifist position but from a common concern to urge the government to search for alternatives to violence," said the bishops.

The Labour government should strive towards "an international consensus" rather than allowing a "superpower mentality" to make the running, they added.

Turkish planes bomb Kurds in north Iraq

DIYARBAKIR (R) — Turkish warplanes raided Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq for the second day in a row on Wednesday, Turkish security officials said.

"Planes bombed the Metina region between five and seven o'clock this morning," a security official told Reuters.

He said F-16 jets from the main southeast Turkish city of Diyarbakir had launched the attacks on Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) positions in Metina, a mountainous region on the Iraqi side of the remote border.

The reports conflicted with denials by Turkey that its military is active in Kurdish-held northern Iraq, which broke from Baghdad's control after the Gulf war in 1991.

"The Turkish armed forces have not carried out operations in northern Iraq for any reason whatsoever," military spokesman Colonel Husnu Dag told a news briefing of diplomatic correspondents on Wednesday.

Security officials in southeast Turkey and witnesses said Turkish troops and jets hit PKK positions in northern Iraq on Tuesday. The rebels use bases in the area in their fight for Kurdish self-rule in southeast Turkey.

Jerusalem killing probably militant attack — police

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — An ultra-Orthodox Jew on his way to morning prayers was stabbed to death, apparently by a Palestinian, in a Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem on Wednesday, police said.

Tensions in the volatile city, already running high after nearly a year of deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, have been exacerbated by recent knifings which police suspect were carried out by Islamists.

"It appears that the stabbing was nationalist in motive," a police spokeswoman said.

Earlier Jerusalem police chief, Yair Yitzhaki, said the circumstances of the killing suggested it might have been the work of Islamists.

"A Jew in Jerusalem is stabbed during an early-morning stroll to the synagogue, a quiet place, no one around him — these circumstances raise the possibility of the direction [of a guerrilla attack]," he told Israel Radio.

Soon after the killing, a Palestinian was lightly wounded in a stabbing in a nearby Jewish neighbourhood in the city's eastern half. Police said the second incident was unconnected with the earlier killing.

Iran's ambassador denies foreign reports of Iranian ambitions in Iraq

AMMAN (Petra) — Iranian ambassador to Jordan Mohammad Ali Subhani oo Wednesday stated that his country has oo ambitions of any kind in Iraq and its forces will not undertake any action that would escalate the situation in the Gulf.

In an interview with the Jordan News Ageocy, Petra, marking Iran's celebratioo of the 19th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Mr. Subhai said all foreign analyses claiming otherwise are totally uotrue.

Iran does not support a military solution to the crisis because similar moves have proven futile in the past, he said, adding that his country is also against any ecooomic sanctions imposed as a political tool to achieve specific objectives.

However, he urged Iraq to implement U.N. Security Council resolutions so as oot to give external powers any justificatioo to launch a military strike, which he said would have very serious consequences.

The possibility of an explosioo is increasing because efforts to contain the crisis have not yet achieved good results, Mr. Subhani said. However, he added that these efforts are continuing.

The ambassador said Iran, whicb is the current president of the Organisatioo of Islamic Conference (OIC), is exerting strenuous efforts through the OIC secretary general to end the crisis peacefully with the help of Islamic countries.

Referring to Jordanian-Iranian relations, Mr. Subhani said the two sides are undertaking joint action in order to further bolster bilateral ties. He stated that Jordan's participation in the Islamic confereoce held in Tehran receotly contributed most positively to bolstering political, economic, informatioo and parliamentary relations.

The ambassador announced that Iranian economic and parliamentary delegations are due to arrive in Amman soon. He said it was agreed that the Iranian embassy in Amman open a special office to promote trade relations and a senior Iranian official will be working through the embassy to achieve that goal.

Jordan and Iran are also conducting negotiations for the resumptioo of air transport between Tehran and Amman to transport goods, tourists and students, and others, Mr. Subhani said.

HIZBOLLAH SUPPORTER EXAMINES MODEL: **A female Hizbollah supporter Wednesday observes a partially damaged Israeli-made Mirkava tank whicb was on display during an Islamic resistance exhibition in Beirut. Hizbollah displayed various maquettes representing operations carried by the group against Israeli troops in southern Lebanon (AFP photo)**

Majali calls on Jordanians to transcend 'culture of shame' in finding employment

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali has called on Jordanian citizens to transcend what he called the "culture of shame" and undertake training in trades that can guarantee employment and help them fill jobs currently held by guest workers.

Education and training has become a very basic factor for development in Jordan and a means for young men and women to find employment, said the prime minister at the opening of a three-day workshop designed to highlight the start of a three-year project on supporting training and employment in Jordan partially financed by the United Nations.

"We keep talking about unemployment and poverty without delving into its causes, and we keep talking about the army of unemployed Jordanians at a time when the Kingdom hosts nearly half a million guest workers," he said.

Dr. Majali said it is regrettable to see tens of thousands of trained Jordanians taking unproductive administrative and clerical jobs, while shunning manual work by failing to overcome the predicament of the "culture of shame."

Jorgen Lissner, resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), told the meeting that young people find it difficult to enter the labour market because they lack job experience.

He said many governments have responded to this challenge by adapting the educational system to the labour market's needs. But he added that this process requires a long time to adapt to the market's requirements and therefore there is need to create special bodies to offer training in different trades to school and college graduates.

In his remarks to the meeting, Minister of Labour Saleh Khasawneh said unemployment and poverty problems can he addressed through increasing productivity, distributing income fairly, and raising the standard of educational and health services.

Dr. Khasawneh said these two issues can be settled through sound economic, investment, social, financial and monetary policies and not only through adapting education to the labour market's needs. He added that the ministry has embarked on the social safety package plan, which is expected to help Jordan deal with the situation, and is seeking donations from friendly nations and international organisations.

The plan, he pointed out, comprises four main elements: improving the infrastructure of poorer areas, financing small-size income-generating projects, promoting the work of the National Aid Fund, and creating a special fund to finance training and employment.

The workshop will cover the plan's project for training and employmeot. The project will cost $6 million, of which $5 million will be provided by the World Bank while the Jordanian treasury is pledging $1 million.

2 suspected PKK separatists killed in shootout with police

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Two suspected Kurdish separatists were killed in a shoot-out with a Turkish anti-terror squad in Istanbul Wednesday, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Police said a man and a woman going by the codenames "Ahmet" and "Zona" were found dead in an apartment in Istanbul's Fatih district after the shoot-out, which erupted when the squad raided the suspects' hide-out.

Weapons, a bomb and documents were seized in the apartment, police said.

The agency described the two victims as "separatist terrorists," shorthand for members of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK).

"Ahmet" and "Zona" were suspected of involvement in an armed attack on a police station in Istanbul's Umraniye district in November, police said.

One policeman was killed in the Umraniye incident and two were wounded.

More than 28,000 people, including rebels, security force members and civilians have been killed in PKK-related violence in Turkey's southeast since 1984 when the group launched its armed campaign for a Kurdish homeland.

Attempt on British embassy foiled

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordanian police guarding the British embassy on Wednesday foiled a man's attempt to throw a Molotov bomb at the embassy building in Abdoun, an embassy spokesperson said.

"The guards arrested the man while he was carrying the bomb at 1:00 p.m.," the spokesperson, who asked not to be named, said.

"The only thing we know is that be was alone," the spokesperson added.

Asked whether the attempt was linked to U.S. and Britain threats to launch a military strike against Iraq, the source said "there was no concrete evidence about this but doubts move to that direction."

Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid said the person, identified as Abed Azam, was being interrogated by police.

Mr. Rashid told the Jordan Times that the attack was part of attacks "against the security of the Kingdom which are directed from outside."

Mr. Rashid said foreign embassies were being put under tight security arrangements.

"This act is one of many attempts that were oot disclosed to the media," Mr. Rashid said without elaboration.

The minister ruled out any connection between the attack and the U.S. threats to launch a military attack on Iraq following Baghdad's refusal to allow U.N. inspectors to enter presidential palaces.

Another British embassy official was quoted by Reuters as saying that the embassy "was notifying staff it was taking action to reinforce the security of the embassy in coojunction with the Jordanian police."

The embassy was telling British organisations in Jordan about the incident and advising them to take extra precautions, the source was quoted as saying by the agency.

But the embassy "was still on the lowest level of alert," the source said.

There are over 2,000 British nationals living in Jordan, and "we are not advising British nationals to leave or avoid leaving Jordan," he stressed.

In London, a Foreign Office spokesman was quoted by AFP as saying: "Obviously in the present climate, you might be inclined to link the attack with Iraqi crisis."

Minister: Detainee commits suicide

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

NA'OUR — A 29-year-old man detained on suspicion of involvement in the September attack against two Israeli embassy guards committed suicide while in the custody of the security forces, Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid said Wednesday.

Mr. Rashid denied allegations by the man's family that he was tortured.

"He killed himself by jumping from the second floor of the building he was being held in," Mr. Rashid told the Jordan Times.

"The coroner's report proves that he was not subjected to any form of torture," the minister asserted.

Mr. Rashid said Ismail Suleiman Ajarmeh was arrested for alleged involvement in "a very sensitive security case."

The Ajarmeh family, meanwhile, insisted they want a full investigation.

"Our brother was killed and we want to know who was responsible for his death," said one of his brothers at their home in Na'our, southwest of Amman.

The brother said Na'our Mayor Thamir Malouh Fayez informed the family on Wednesday about the death of Ajarmeh and asked them to take the body.

"We will not bury him before we know why he was kept in jail for several months without trial and how he was died," the brother said.

He said their brother was arrested oo Sept. 26, three days after the attack that left two Israeli security officials, Moshe Levin and Amikam Hadar, injured.

Ajarmeh's brother said another person, Samih Mohammed Dawood, was also arrested but released after two months of detention.

"Our brother was not affiliated with any political party and we were shocked when he was arrested," said another brother.

His family said they sought a meeting with His Majesty King Hussein Wednesday but could only meet with Royal Court Chief Awn Khasawneh, who promised to arrange an audience with His Majesty in the coming two days.

Syria lifts brief ban on Jordanians entering with new version of passport

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Syria has lifted a several-day ban on the entry of Jordanians holding issues of newly-disbursed passports after the Foreign Ministry pressed Damascus for explanations over its surprise move, officials and diplomats said Wednesday.

Many Jordanians had complained over the past week that they were turned back at the Syrian borders because the new passports did not include provisions for the place of residence and had a different format than the previous ones.

The Passports Department (PD) last week began issuing the new passports under a different format to facilitate the travel of citizens in line with global standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

"The misunderstanding was settled," Issam Haddad, consul at the Syrian embassy in Amman, told the Jordan Times. "Now, any Jordanian carrying a valid passport can enter Syria with no restrictions as long as it includes a national number."

The director general of the PD, Awni Yirfas, said the Syrians apparently had objections because the new passports did not include the place of residence of the holder.

"The new passports were printed according to international standards, which do not attach importance to the place of residence," added Mr. Yirfas.

Officials said Amman had informed Damascus about its plans to issue the new version of the passports long before they were disbursed.

Unlike the previous format, vital information about the passport's holder is printed in horizontal form, instead of the previous vertical form. The national oumber, given to anyone who is included in a family book, is displayed on the front page instead of the back page.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION
Tel. 773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes
14:10 ..... The Dinky Di's
14:30 The Prince and the Pauper
15:00 .....French Programmes
17:00 .....NBA
18:00 .....Marker
19:00 .....Le Journal
19:15 .....Documentary
19:30 .....News Headlines
19:35 .....Big Brother Jake
20:00 .....Trivial Pursuit
20:30 .....Lois and Clark
21:10 The Opra Winfrey Show
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 Soccer Match — Ghana vs. Togo
00:12 Feature film ..... "Beyond the Stars"

Friday Programmes
14:10 .....Ruxpin
14:30 .....Wishbone
15:00 .....French Programmes
17:00 .....Lucky Luke
18:00 .....Tarazan
19:00 ..... Le Journal
19:15 Documentary — Allo la Terre
19:35 .....F.R.I.E. N.D.S.
20:00 ..... Life on the Iinternet
20:30 ..... The Album Show
21:10 Adventures of Brisco County
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 Feature film: "The Beast"
23:59 .....Comedy — "Almost Home"

PRAYER TIMES

04:59 .....Fajr
06:18 .....(Sunrise) Duha
11:50 .....Dhuhr
14:55 .....'Asr
17:22 .....Maghreb
18:40 .....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.
Church of Nazarene Tel. 675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Cold weather conditions will continue to prevail during the weekend, skies partly cloudy, with a chance of scattered showers, and winds northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, rainy, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman 03/10
Aqaba 11/20
Deserts.....02/12
Jordan Valley 10/18

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 09, Aqaba 20
Humidity readings: Amman 66 per cent, Aqaba 72 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Fayez Dabbas 759155
Dr. Fakher Bilbeisi 5522233
Dr. Adnan Zaghloul 898140
Dr. Mazen Nbali 830435
Firas pharmacy 5661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy.....637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir ...278770
Al Quds pharmacy .....(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Zuhour Al Qadi ...906606
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency ...199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, ...644281/6
Akileh Maternity, ...642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital ...5669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 5666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir, ...775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery ...865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital .....(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital .....(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital .....(09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital .....(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital .....(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital .....(02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital .....(03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25 .....Bombay (RJ)
08:30 .....Sanaa (RJ)
09:15 .....Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30 ..... New Delhi (RJ)
10:05 .....Beirut (RJ)
10:05 .....Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:15 .....Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:30 ..... Colombo (RJ)
18:05 .....Kuwait (RJ)
18:10 .....London, Athens (RJ)
18:55 ...Bongkok, Calcutta (RJ)
19:20 .....Moscow (RJ)
19:45 ...Abu Dhabi, Al'Ain (RJ)
00:30 ..... Larnaca (RJ)

Other Flights
13:15 .....Riyadh (SV)
14:10 .....Shariqah (AH)
15:00 .....Doha (QR)
15:20 .....Muscat, Doha (GF)
16:00 ..... Dubai (EK)
16:30 .....Rome (AZ)
20:00 .....Tel Aviv (MS)
20:10 .....Beirut (ME)
20:40 .....Cairo (MS)
23:10 .....Istanbul (TK)
23:30 .....London, Beirut (BA)

Royal Wings (RW)
(For Thursday and Friday)
07:45 ..... Aqaba (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20 .....Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 .....Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:20 .....Beirut (RJ)
10:00 .....Moscow (RJ)
11:00 Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:30 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
11:30 ...Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:05 .....Kuwait (RJ)
12:10 .....Athens, Paris (RJ)
12:15 .....London (RJ)
20:10 .....Cairo (RJ)
21:00 .....Larnaca (RJ)
21:30 .....Jeddah (RJ)
23:00 .....Jakarta (RJ)

Other Flights
00:35 .....Amsterdam (KL)
03:00 .....Athens (OA)
06:40 .....Beirut, London (BA)
08:00 ..... Beirut (ME)
11:20 .....London (BA)
14:45 .....Riyadh (SV)
15:00 .....Algiers (AH)
15:55 .....Doha (QR)
16:20 ...Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)
17:00 ....Muscat, Dubai (EK)
17:30 .....Rome (AZ)
21:20 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 .....Cairo (MS)
08:00 .....Beirut (ME)

Royal Wings
(For Thursday and Friday)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 .....Aqaba (RW)
09:30 .....Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55 .....Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 .... Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 ..... Aqaba (RW)

Jordan has done everything possible to 'avert the use of force' in Iraq-U.N. weapons inspections standoff — Crown Prince

AMMAN (J.T.) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan on Tuesday said Jordan has done everything in its power to avert the use of force in the standoff between Iraq and the U.N. over weapons inspections.

"We are living rather a sombre moment, and everything we see on TV is about the movement of armies and air forces: and as I said we have tried to do everything within our power to try and avert this crisis and the use of force," said Prince Hassan at a joint press conference with EC President Jacques Santer.

The Crown Prince also told the press that he and the EC president discussed issues pertaining to partnership with Europe in culture, economic and security affairs.

Following is Prince Hassan's address to the press conference and replies to questions:

"Clearly the status of our discussions was one where ratification would be expected by the parliaments of the EU on the one hand and indeed the Parliament of Jordan on the other.

"I hope that the partnership talks in their three component parts, culture, economic cooperation and indeed security issues, broadly defined, can be a part of progression working to closer relations between Europe and countries of the Mediterranean, both in the West and the East.

"But I assume the concern of the moment is very much security-related, whether in the context of security and stability of the peace process, and this is an issue that we touched on earlier in the discussions or in terms of security and stability of the region broadly defined with particular focus on developments in Iraq and beyond."

Q: With the impasse in the Middle East peace process and the volatile critical situation in Iraq, if anything happens on either side, would the partnership agreement with Jordan move accordingly and in what direction would it change?

A: I'd like to emphasise the importance of regional cooperation with Europe in the context of the 15 European governments. I think there is a shared concern for the furthering of the peace process on the one hand and for the possibility of the use of force, which of course at this critical moment is the key question on our minds. The eventuality of the use of force if this is to take place at all is one that has to be considered. We have to look beyond the weeks ahead and in that sense, I want to say that clearly as far as the baskets of cooperation with Europe are concerned, and when we speak about economic cooperation, I just like to say that the good news story in terms of Jordan's economy is that clearly, let me give you one parameter: Inflation has been brought down from over 20 per cent in 1992, to three per cent in 1997. But again, when we speak about the cost of war in terms of the region, and I'm not talking about the cost of the mobilisation of the forces present in the region, I took the opportunity of observing that recession in Southeast Asia might mean that arms manufacturers are looking for new markets. But at the same time, I want to say that as far as the cost of war is concerned in human terms, the possibility of displaced persons, refugees in large numbers, the breakdown of infrastructure, the shortage of oil supplies, all of these issues are of deep and dividing concern to Jordan, and the sense of déjà-vu in 1990 to 1998 doesn't make it any better.

Q: Everybody knows what will happen to Iraq if it doesn't comply with the United Nations resolutions but what about those who do not listen to your pleas for a diplomatic solution?

A: I think that public perception in this part of the world looks at the implementation of the United Nations resolutions in the case of Iraq, in the case of Palestine, in the case of South Africa if we recall an embargoed country for many, many years with weapons of mass destruction, and yet an embargo being raised to lead to a political transitional solution to political prisoners being released, to democracy prevailing with equal rights for all. We look at United Nations resolutions in Bosnia, where war criminals are within a fairly short distance of international forces and yet effectively they are not brought to justice. So I think that in terms of public perception there is this feeling that why do United Nations resolutions not get implemented across the board? We watched with interest, of course, the visit of His Holiness the Pope to Cuba rather closer to Mexico. It is rather interesting to hear the commentator of one of the leading channels saying "defiance in Iraq and defiance in Cuba." Of course, there are different contexts of defiance and there are different solutions to problems. But the fact is that we are living rather a sombre moment at the moment, and everything we see on TV channels is about the movement of the armies and air forces and as I said, we have tried to do everything within our power in every contact that we have with the French government, the Russian government, not to mention the United States, the United Kingdom and indeed regional governments, to try and avert this crisis in the sense of averting the use of force.

I'd also like to comment by saying that this region is the only region that has no conflict prevention, or conflict resolution centre, we have no regional problems solving mechanism. So, on the one side we have the Arab League, which is now expressing an interest in averting the use of force, on the other side we have the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) but the time is ticking on and I don't think we have much time left to contain this recurrence of the use of force.

Q: Your Royal Highness, I wonder if you could share with us your concerns specifically if there are strikes on Iraq, how that will affect your country, the fall out for the region and the impact it would have on the peace process?

A. We are talking of the possibility of hundreds of thousands of refugees moving in the directions of the borders of Iraq's neighbours and we are not the only neighbour of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Syria. That, of course, is a position that has compelled us to say that we would be forced to close the border. We simply cannot absorb further hundreds of thousands of refugees. During the 1990-1991 period, it was the situation of receiving third country nationals and we were able to process the movement of 1.5 million people and yet we were the most affected country after Kuwait, of 24 countries most affected by the Gulf war, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, Jordan was at the top of the list. There is that fear, there is also the concern obviously, about the future of oil supplies and there again I want to say that oil supplies from Iraq are our only source at the present time. To talk about building infrastructure for new pipelines from other countries is going to take a lot of time and cost a lot of money. And I just want to make it very clear that whatever the good news of our economic achievements, which among other things, have made us eligible for Euro-partnership, the bad news is to try to maintain that standard of achievement in what obviously would be a very, very difficult situation. We are in a sense, as I said, facing a sense of déjà-vu, we've been through it all once before and we continue to express the hope that Iraq will comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions, that a political resolution can be found, that force can be averted and that indeed the question of a regional security cooperative concept can develop to include all countries in the region, from Iraq eastward. We are obviously concerned of the future of dual containment. What's going to happen to the so-called dual containment when such strikes take place, What is the future of relations with Iran. Again, one of the political questions that are raised, particularly at the time we hear the continued talking of cultural dialogue, Samuel Huntington thesis of the new threat, the green peril, the Islamic peril. These are all issues that have to be borne in mind. I know they are not very comfortable issues to be mentioned at a time like this, but we are not talking about comfort, we are talking about the perceptions of our population, and I think the Arab population and the Muslim population in this region who are living one of the major psychological crises of this age.

Turning on from the psychological situation, I think it is going to be very difficult to further the peace process in the fallout of a military confrontation. I think, as General Schwarzkopf said the other day, "if bombing takes place, people will get up and dust themselves off and it might all start again," given the Vietnam example and with reference towards a resolution, the resolve of the Iraqi people. But as far as confrontation is concerned and its effects on the situation in the Palestinian territories, already we are being shown film material of demonstrations in the territories and I think is a very difficult situation. Of course, there is another school of thought that says well, if the Iraqi crisis is resolved by the use of force, we might find a more subdued response to the importance of returning to the negotiating table. But thus far, the news has not been very encouraging, particularly after the respective visits of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat to Washington.

Q: At what point would Jordan support a military strike against Iraq?

A: I don't think the question of Jordan supporting a military strike against an Arab country has ever been considered under any condition.

Q: Even if the United Nations decided that Iraq is not complying with the United Nations resolutions?

A. We are an Arab country. In 1956, there was an attack on an Arab country, Egypt, at that time, the so-called trilateral British, French and Israeli. President Nasser continued in power for several years more. A couple of years later, a friendly government was changed in Baghdad, and Iraqi history since is there for you to see. We feel that very serious consideration is to be given not only to the content of an air strike in its limited objectives of compliance with the removal of weapons of mass-destruction, which incidentally doesn't affect Washington, London, Paris and Moscow as directly as they affect us here living in this [situation], of the possibility of the fall of a missile. We are firmly opposed to the presence of weapons of mass-destruction in this region as a whole without exception. But at the same time, I think consideration has to be given to the political aftermath, and the questions you have asked that are very relevant to that, whether in the case of Palestine or in the case of the future of the region. We don't want to see this region Balkanised into small groups of violent, chronic terrorist, whether sectarian, tearing up the heart of this region.

Q: Your Royal Highness said your meeting with President Santer was the first after the signature of the association agreement with the European Union. How do you assess the Jordan-European relations, especially economic relations?

A: As to this partnership agreement, it is basically about economic and cultural cooperation. But as to the cooperation in political spheres, we hope that we can bridge the Mediterranean by building institutional cooperation like parliamentary relations and civic society within the framework of the state of law. We hope that this agreement will be implemented within clearly defined principles.

Q: Is there any message which you intend to address the Iraqi president through the Iraqi foreign minister during his visit to Jordan?

A: Our stand is very clear, as was explained by His Majesty King Hussein in his message addressed to me while he was in London. The U.N. Security Council's stand and its reference to the military option is not one of deception. There is serious probability of resorting to a military strike, but we hope the mediation efforts as conducted by Arab, Islamic, French and Russian governments will lead to a political solution that would save the Iraqi people from suffering.

DELEGATES EXPRESS APPRECIATION TO PRINCESS: HRH Princess Rahma is presented with a gift by the president of one of the 12 gymnastics federations attending the general assembly meeting of the Arab Gymnastics Federation, which opened in Amman Wednesday (Petra photo)

Deputies ask government to lift ban on demonstrations

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Several Lower House deputies asked the government on Monday to lift a ban on all public demonstrations of solidarity with Iraq, saying the decision contradicted democratic rights and freedom of expression.

Threats by the United States and Britain to strike Baghdad if it does not give U.N. arms inspectors unlimited access to sites suspected to contain materials for weapons of mass destruction has enraged many Jordanians who remain supportive of the Iraqi people.

"At a time when Iraq is under [the threat of] an American attack, rallies and marches should be allowed as an expression of Jordan's sympathetic position towards Iraq," leftist Deputy Nasha't Hamarneh told the House.

The government on Tuesday banned any rallies and warned the mainly Islamist-led opposition parties, which include pan-Arabists and leftists, that it was ready to take measures to ensure the decision was enforced.

Mr. Hamarneh said he was surprised by the move, which also covers any indoor and outdoor gatherings that can be construed as public demonstrations or political marches.

The ban dampened the hopes of the opposition to hold a procession from the Grand Husseini Mosque in downtown Amman to the nearby Hashemiah square after this Friday's noon prayers.

Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid on Tuesday said the government "will not allow any marches or movement under any slogan for any reason anywhere in the Kingdom at this crucial stage that the country is passing through."

In a statement carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, he said the measures are aimed at safeguarding the country and preventing any "attempt by those harbouring ill-intentions against this country to infiltrate our ranks."

Deputy Mohammad Bataineh, the only member of the Communist Party in the House, also asked the government to allow opposition parties and professional unions to organise public demonstrations.

"We do not want to regress," Dr. Bataineh said. "The government should reconsider its latest ban and should allow the other side to express its opinion regarding the oppressive attack."

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, replying to the deputies' concerns, said Jordanians were highly educated and "disciplined and did not need this tool, public demonstration, to express their opinion."

"We do not fear intellectuals, opinion leaders, professional associations' presidents or political parties' secretary generals, because they are disciplined," Dr. Ensour told the House. "But rather we fear infiltrators and enemy agents, whom we should resist in emergencies."

Officials said the government's move was a precautionary measure to defuse a possible outburst of pro-Iraqi sentiments similar to that during the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis, when thousands of Jordanians took to the streets in support of Iraq.

Security sources told Reuters that they have been put on a state of alert while protection of key government installations and Amman-based Western targets has also been stepped up against possible sabotage acts during any outbreak of hostilities.

Also during yesterday's session, Amman Fifth District Deputy Munir Sobar asked the government to reaffirm its commitment to keeping bread subsidies in place.

The government reasserted its pledge to support Mr. Sobar's demand.

Ironically, Mr. Sobar was minister of supply in the Cabinet of Abdul Karim Kabariti, which lifted the subsidies in line with IMF demands in August 1996. The move then led to protests in Karak and other nearby towns.

After a two-month discussion, the House finally completed its discussion of the draft customs law, which it inherited from the 12th Parliament.

However, the House is expected to endorse all 258 articles of the law, part of a new package of economic legislation, and vote on it during its upcoming session.

what's going on

PIANO RECITAL

* Piano recital by French pianist Philippe Giusiano at the Royal Cultural Centre on Saturday, Feb. 14, at 8:00 p.m. (to perform pieces by Chopin, Ravil, and Rachmaninoff).

FILMS

* Spanish film "The Swordship Teacher" at Instituto Cervants, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

* "Goya" (in English with commentary in Arabic by Dr. Mazin Asfour) at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

PLAY

* Children's play "A Theatre Dream" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 10:00 a.m. (daily until Feb. 21).

EXHIBITIONS

* Paintings by Sudanese artist Salah Al Murr at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 23.

* Valentine's Day bazaar at Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation off Wadi Saqra Street (Tel. 699141/2, until Feb. 14.

* Private collection of Mamdouh Bisharat entitled "A Vision, An Identity" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 5 (Tel. 643251).

Police arrest two in connection with stolen 'Picasso' collection

By Rana Husseini
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Police on Wednesday announced the arrest of two of four Arab nationals in connection with the seized collection of stolen paintings, suspected of being the work of Spanish artist Picasso, that were smuggled into Jordan for sale from a neighbouring country.

The paintings, along with two gold statues, were found in the possession of four Jordanians who were arrested after police were tipped off that the men were looking for art buyers to sell the paintings.

An official source said the two men, both Iraqis, testified that they smuggled the goods via the Jordanian-Iraqi border, and that "they spent two months trying to find buyers."

"When they could not sell the paintings, they asked four Jordanians to help them find buyers and to target tourists and Israeli art collectors," the official said.

Jordanian officials have said the paintings, believed to have been stolen from a Kuwaiti palace during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, were smuggled into the Kingdom by four Iraqi nationals.

The officials hinted that there is a large possibility that the paintings are fakes and that the paintings "were referred to professional art experts to determine if they were originals."

If proven authentic, the paintings could be worth over $40 million.

Three charged with murder for 1997 attack

By Rana Husseini
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Criminal Prosecutor has charged three people, including a woman, with premeditated murder in connection with a May 1997 attack on a postal van in Karak, according to judicial sources.

The attack on May 3 left Abdul Wahab Ahmad Ali, the van's driver, dead. The assailants escaped with the JD100,000 that was being transported in the van.

Maha Mohammad, 27, Izzat Fawzi, 38, and Mohammad Haroun, 36, were also charged by Criminal Prosecutor Bassem Momani with theft, criminal complicity, and possessing an unlicensed gun.

Two additional suspects, Hani Mustafa, 40, and Ahmad Abdul Rahim, were charged with purchasing stolen goods.

According to the prosecution charge sheet, the third defendant Mohammad Haroun, was employed by Abdul M'uti Nasser Company, a transport service delivering mail and money between banks in Amman and cities in the south, and used to accompany the victim on these trips.

Mr. Haroun then met with Mr. Fawzi and suggested that they kill the driver of the van and steal the money transported on their trips, the sheet added.

The two decided that they needed a female partner to help them with their plot, whereupon they recruited Ms. Mohammad, it said.

On the day of the incident, the sheet added, the defendants headed to Wadi Musa, met with Mr. Ali, lured him to a deserted area, struck him on the head with a bottle, then Mr. Fawzi drew a gun and shot him.

The three then took the money that was in the van and fled the scene to Amman, where they split the money. The defendants also gave the two other suspects, Mr. Mustafa and Mr. Abdul Rahim, an amount of U.S. dollars that was in the van to be exchanged.

According to the judicial sources, the case of the five will be transferred to the Criminal Court, which will set a date to start the trial.

Valentine's Day fever sweeping the country with special deals for lovers

By Munther Murjan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Valentine's Day fever is sweeping Jordan as flower shops, restaurants, candy shops and music centres compete to help Jordanians find ways to make hearts melt on Saturday.

Only several years back, Valentine's Day almost went unnoticed in Jordan. But rapid social changes and greater openness have altered popular perceptions, though the celebration remains restricted to those who can afford it.

Freddy For Music, in cooperation with Alissar Flowers, have come up with a new concept they termed "valen-tune" — sending flowers with a live love song performed by a soloist or a band.

Rania Mdanat from Freddy for Music said scores of people from all ages and walks of life had telephoned to inquire about the concept. Many callers also made bookings for Saturday, when people worldwide celebrate Valentine's Day.

"We made prices as low as JD25 for a solo musician, either a guitarist or saxophonist, which we believe is affordable," she told the Jordan Times. "Of course, if you wish to have a band or a pianist in the middle of Wadi Rum, with food and roses surrounding you and your sweetheart, we can fulfil that wish for the right price," she explained.

For flower shops, Valentine's Day means brisk business. A red rose that normally sells for JD1 can easily fetch up to JD5 and sometimes JD10.

Five-star hotels, restaurants and popular food joints scrambled to win customers, promising candle-lit gourmet dinners, free flowers, chocolates, heart-shaped cookies and other surprises.

"Chocolate to say 'I love you'," screamed a newspaper ad placed by a renowned chocolatier.

Some Jordanians said they were planning to rent limousines to take their sweethearts on a tour of Amman with a bottle of champagne.

Taybet Zaman, a renovated touristic resort near the rose-red city of Petra, invited Jordanians to enjoy two-days and one-night "of uninterrupted pampering," including a Turkish bath treat and a "hearty breakfast."

Some, however, said they weren't planning to celebrate the event.

"I can hardly find money to feed my family," said office boy Mohammad Nasser, a father of eight who earns JD80 a month.

"You want me to waste money on a rose for my wife?" he asked.

"I am totally against limiting your expression of love to your wife to one day a year. This is encouraged even from a religious point of view," said Rami Omar, a shop assistant in the popular area of Qweismeh. "Love should be celebrated throughout the year with affection," he added. "But I do not approve of the idea of sending flowers to your girlfriend."

But in general, many said they looked forward to February 14 every year to express their love to their sweetheart.

Olga Bajali, who is married, said she always looks forward to Valentine's Day, because her husband spoils her.

"On this day, I usually wake up to find a bouquet of roses, a heart shaped chocolate box, and a card. Later, my husband takes me out for dinner."

Lama Subaei, an executive secretary, had a different view. "For me, Valentine is to celebrate love with friends and not lovers only, since they usually break up after a while."

N. Ireland peace process threatened by IRA killings

BELFAST (AFP) — Northern Ireland security forces were Wednesday investigating the extent of Irish Republican Army (IRA) involvement in two murders which have raised fresb uncertainty over the future of the peace process.

A return to violence by the IRA, if proved, would almost certainly lead to the expulsion from talks of its political wing Sinn Fein and threaten a return of the IRA's campaign of shootings and bombings.

Although no group has yet said it carried out the murders — one drugs-related and the other sectarian according to police — security sources indicated three people arrested over the second killing were IRA members.

Suspicions of IRA involvement were heightened when the other main Catholic paramilitary group, the hardline Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), denied killing either Brendan Campbell, a Catholic drug dealer, or Robert Dougan, a Protestant with links to the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association.

But the absence of any statement by the IRA of an intention to abandon its seven-month ceasefire also raised the prospect that the killings were carried out by renegade Catholic paramilitaries.

Some members of the IRA are known to have grown disillusioned with the talks process over perceived compromises made to Protestants. Last month the group warned the negotiations were "in crisis."

But security sources have repeatedly stressed that the IRA has strictly observed the ceasefire it called on July 20 last year, and attacks credited to it since then are at an all-time low.

London and Dublin have insisted all participants in the negotiations abide by a principle of non-violence.

The ejection of Sinn Fein, as the representative of the main Catholic paramilitary group, would effectively sound the death-knell for the talks, which London and Dublin have said must reacb a solution by the end of May.

It could also free the IRA to resume its campaign of shootings and bombings in Northern Ireland and mainland Britain.

If the two governments do not expel Sinn Fein, the talks could collapse anyway with the withdrawal in protest by Protestants.

In addition, suspicion of IRA involvement could be enough for Protestant paramilitaries to carry out retaliatory killings.

Last month the Protestant Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) was forced out of the talks after police blamed its military wing the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) for the murders of three Catholics.

The UDP and the main Protestant party the Ulster Unionists have already accused the IRA of being behind both killings, and the UDP has demanded Sinn Fein too be thrown out.

The UDP's Gary McMichael said: "All the fingers are being pointed solely at the IRA and that being the case, their ceasefire has ended."

Late Tuesday London warned that if either murder was shown to bave been committed "by an organisation connected with a participant in these talks, then the implications of that will need to be very seriously examined."

"The government is determined to maintain the integrity of this process," said junior Northern Ireland minister Paul Murpby.

Later Wednesday Mr. Murphy's boss, Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam, was expected to be questioned by Protestant MPs in the House of Commons.

Dougan was shot dead in a Belfast suburb as he sat behind the wbeel of his car. Shortly afterwards the three suspects were arrested in a flat in Catholic area of west Belfast after a car was abandoned nearby.

Campbell, who had escaped another attempt on his life in the past three weeks, died late Monday after being shot in south Belfast. Reports said the IRA's "punishment" arm, Direct Action Against Drugs, was responsible.

Meanwhile, another Protestant escaped without injury when he was shot at by a masked man in Portadown, in the south of province Tuesday night.

In nearby Armagh, a second man was also sbot twice in the left knee and once in the right and beaten with sticks by a group of masked men. The attack was typical of "punishments" favoured by Catholic paramilitaries for activities deemed harmful to the community.

American actor Robert de Niro uses a flashlight to hinder journalists as he leaves the Paris courthouse after questioning in connection with a prostitution ring aimed at wealthy Middle East clients (Reuters photo)

Robert de Niro denies involvement in call-girl ring

PARIS (AFP) — Robert de Niro denied any involvement in an international call-girl ring, his lawyer said Wednesday a day after the actor was interrogated by a judge probing a prostitution racket.

Lawyer Georges Kiejman said at a news conference that Mr. de Niro told investigators that "he had never paid a young woman."

The 54-year-old Oscar-winning actor was brought in Tuesday by police as a witness on a warrant from investigating magistrate Frederic N'Guyen, who interrogated the actor for two and three quarter hours following several hours of questioning by police.

"It is evident that Mr. de Niro has nothing to do with any pimping case," Mr. Kiejman said.

The U.S. actor was questioned in connection with an investigation launched last year into a ring allegedly supplying high-class prostitutes to well-beeled clients.

Mr. Kiejman said that of the three women mentioned during the interrogation Mr. de Niro told investigators he had merely shaken hands with two and that "his answers on the third are censored."

Mr. de Niro was picked up by police from the prestigious Bristol Hotel for questioning on returning to Paris Tuesday after taking a long weekend break in shooting a film directed by John Frankenheimer entitled Ronin.

Mr. Keijman said he was filing a complaint for violation of freedom of movement and right to legal privacy because of leaks to the press that his client was being sought for questioning in the probe.

Prostitution is legal in France but pimping is not.

Tuesday, investigators brought Mr. de Niro in before noon and released him from Paris police headquarters shortly after 9:00 p.m. (2000 GMT). They said the actor had raised no objections.

Mr. Kiejman, a celebrity lawyer and former justice minister who has acted for Mohammad Fayed, the owner of Harrod's Department Store in London, and the family of former Frencb President Francois Mitterrand, also criticised the fact that he had been questioned all day.

Mr. N'Guyen's investigation began a year ago following the arrest of a glamour photographer and an ex-model believed to be the organisers of an international racket supplying high-class prostitutes for the rich and famous.

Former Scandinavian model Anika Brumarck and French photographer Jean-Pierre Bourgeois, who worked for soft porn magazines, are facing charges of procurement.

They are alleged to have run some 40 women from a Paris telephone number who were dispatched to dates with well-heeled businessmen in Paris as well as in Monaco, New York, London or the Arab emirates, for sums ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 francs ($850 to $3,300), excluding travel expenses.

A number of U.S. and other film stars have been mentioned in connection with the probe, which has also seen charges levelled against French film producer Alain Sarde, former top French police officer Paul Baril and former Polisb tennis professional Wojtek Fibak.

Ronin is about six mercenaries chasing after a mysterious suitcase coveted by several obscure international groups. Jonathan Pryce, the villain in the latest James Bond movie, is part of the cast.

Shooting began on Nov. 3 and is scheduled to continue until March. The action in Mr. Frankenheimer's film races between the roofs of the historic Montmartre district, the Champs Elysees and other tourist spots in the French capital.

Mr. de Niro leapt to stardom after playing in Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets" and "Taxi-Driver" and won the Academy Award for Best Actor in 1980 for his role in "Raging Bull". He took the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor in 1974 for "The Godfather" part II.

Other of his best-known roles include those in "The Deer-Hunter," "The Mission" and "Cape Fear."

Mr. Frankenheimer, who turns 68 this month, made the 1962 hit "The Birdman of Alcatraz." He shot "French Connection II" in France.

Bosnian president slams French honours for Plavsic

SARAJEVO (AFP) — Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has protested at the French government's decision to receive Bosnian Serb leader Biljana Plavsic as a head of state during her visit to France this week.

Ms. Plavsic, who is president of Republika Srpska, the Serbian half of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was accorded full honours in Paris Monday in recognition of her support for the Dayton Peace accords.

"We remind the French government ... that Bosnia is a state and the Republika Srpska is simply a part of that state," Mr. Izetbegovic said in a statement handed to the French ambassador in Bosnia, Yves Gaudel.

France's decision to treat Ms. Plavsic as a head of state had "deeply upset Bosnia and its people," he added.

During her one-day stay in Paris, Ms. Plavsic met French President Jacques Chirac and held talks with Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine.

The Dayton Peace accords signed in Paris in December 1995, which ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, established two entities — the Croat-Muslim Federation and the Bosnian Serbs' Republika Srpska.

Mr. Izetbegovic, a Muslim, heads the three-man Bosnian presidency, which also includes the Croat Krešimir Zubak and the Serb Momcilo Krajisnik.

In his statement, Mr. Izetbegovic also complained it was "not the first time" that French attitudes had disappointed the Bosnian government.

He recalled "the deplorable attitude" regarding the former Muslim enclave of Srebrenica of French General Bernard Janvier, who was commander of U.N. forces in Bosnia.

The force has often been accused of allowing the enclave to fall into Serb hands in July 1995.

The president further denounced a French "refusal to cooperate" with the U.N. war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, based in The Hague. Paris has refused to allow French peacekeeping soldiers who were in Bosnia during the civil war to testify before the tribunal.

Czech MPs debate NATO ratification

PRAGUE (AFP) — The Czech parliament began Wednesday debating a bill to ratify the Czech Republic's application to join NATO, of wbicb Prague hopes soon to become a full member.

Opening a debate expected to last some weeks, Premier Josef Tosovsky called on deputies divided over membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to put aside their differences.

"The possibility of joining is a unique chance and a historic challenge for our country. It is up to us to respond," he said.

The Czech Republic along with Hungary and Poland hope to become full NATO members within the next few years. Their foreign ministers have travelled to Washington this week to press their cases.

In Prague, while the centre-right ruling coalition favours NATO entry, opposition Communists, republicans and far-right deputies are against it.

In addition, the largest parliamentary party, the Social Democrats (CSSD) who have 58 out of the 200 seats in parliament, wants a decision on NATO delayed until after legislative elections expected in June.

Although it does not openly oppose NATO membership, the CSSD also wants a referendum on the issue.

Public opinion is also divided. Only 54 per cent support joining NATO, despite efforts by the government since last month to convince Czechs of the benefits.

Mr. Tosovsky said NATO membership would have an economic impact on the country by "strengthening our credibility with foreign investors and financial and trade institutions."

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were invited by NATO to join the alliance at its Madrid summit last July, and signed adhesion documents in December.

Actual accession of the three is envisaged for April 1999, pending ratification of the adhesion documents by the 16 current NATO member states. Canada and Denmark bave so far ratified the documents.

First helicopter lands with Afghan quake aid

RUSTAQ, Afghanistan (R) — The first helicopter carrying humanitarian aid for victims of a devastating earthquake arrived in the Afghan town of Rustaq Wednesday, a week after the first quake struck.

The helicopter, which flew in from neighbouring Tajikistan, carried two tonnes of bread, clothes and medicines, relief workers said.

Rustaq is at the centre of the northern Afghan region devastated by last Wednesday's quake and another smaller quake at the weekend.

Relief agencies bave put the total death toll as high as 4,200 and say thousands more are homeless. The dead are being buried in mass graves.

The region's remote location and bad weather have severely hampered the relief operation, as has conflict between Afghanistan's purist Islamist Taleban militia and opposition groups who control the Rustaq region.

Low clouds continued to obscure the mountains Wednesday. Tuesday heavy snow also added to the victims' woes.

"If the weather is good, then we have tonnes of aid ready to come in," said Jarle Thorghersen, a member of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Rustaq.

He said 4,300 people were being sbeltered in public buildings around Rustaq, with up to 6,000 more displaced people being put up in private homes.

Up to 28 villages have been badly hit, in many cases completely razed, by the quakes. Lack of transport bas made it difficult for Afghans to reach Rustaq for supplies and medical attention.

Seven dissidents freed but must leave Cuba

HAVANA (AFP) — Six hunger-striking Cuban dissidents bave been freed from prison, along with a seventh colleague, on condition that they leave the island nation, a doctor working with them told AFP Tuesday.

Pope John Paul II had asked President Fidel Castro for a gesture for prisoners during a Jan. 21-25 visit here, and the dissidents in the central city of Santa Clara had been considered likely beneficiaries.

Some of the dissidents were freed Jan. 31 and others on Feb. 1, said Armando Ocana, a member of an illegal human rights group to which the dissidents also belonged.

The six members of the Pro-Human Rights Party began their bunger strike on Oct. 9 after they were arrested for demanding an end to the trial of their colleague Daula Carpio.

Ms. Carpio and her sister Roxana were among the seven dissidents ordered to leave the island.

Mr. Ocana said all the dissidents had been taken to a bospital in Santa Clara due to their poor state of health after the hunger strike.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ocana added, they await a response to their request that some country give them political asylum.

The dissidents are confident they will be allowed to leave Cuba, Mr. Ocana said, but as of Tuesday they had not been approached either by any foreign diplomatic representative about their asylum request.

If there is no official response, tbe medical doctor said, "they will take turns in renewing their hunger strike."

According to clandestine human rigbts groups, more than 500 dissidents are in Cuban jails, along with 110,000 common criminals.

UNHCR suspends activities in northern Caucasus

MOSCOW (AFP) — The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) announced it was suspending its activities in the northern Caucasus in response to the kidnapping of its mission head, ITAR-TASS said Wednesday.

Vincent Cochetel was grabbed by gunmen on Jan. 29 from his flat in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz and has not been heard of since, though regional officials say they bave information he is still alive.

Two men, including Mr. Cochetel's driver, are in detention helping investigators with their inquiries, but neither bas been charged.

The driver was left behind when the armed gang burst into the 37-year-old Frencbman's flat.

Police are convinced the kidnappers were tipped off tbat U.N. staff bad withdrawn a large cash sum from a local bank, wbicb had sparked the abduction. U.N. staff have been followed to the bank within the past montb.

Authorities have had no word from the Mr. Cochetel's kidnappers, but last week said they expected to receive a ransom demand soon.

It is U.N. policy is not to pay ransoms, but once contact has been made with the hostage-takers, UNHCR officials say they will offer local authorities a trained hostage negotiator.

Kidnappings bave been relatively rare in North Ossetia, even though they are quite common in Chechenya and the neighbouring Russian republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Various Cbecben criminal groups are believed to be bolding several dozen hostages, including a number of foreign aid workers.

Monday, Cbecben special forces freed five Polish aid workers in an early morning raid almost two month after their abduction.

Indian party suggests secular government after ballot

NEW DELHI (AFP) — An Indian politician hinted Wednesday that the Congress party and a centre-left coalition may form a "secular" coalition in the event of a hung parliament to keep Hindu nationalists out of power.

S.G. Vinayagamurthy, of the Tamil Manila Congress (TMC) party, said he expected an alliance to block the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party).

India goes to the polls Monday, on the first day of a staggered ballot ending on March 7.

The TMC is a key member of the outgoing United Front (UF) coalition.

Its minority government was toppled in November by its outside backer, the Congress, after an uneasy cohabitation lasting 18 months, leading to the current elections.

Most analysts expect a fractured election verdict, in which the BJP and its allies are seen as the front-runners ahead of the Congress, followed by the United Front.

The United News of India (UNI) quoted Mr. Vinayagamurthy as saying the Congress and UF would forget their mutual animosity after the vote in order to foil a BJP-led coalition government.

"We are sure this will happen after the elections, leading to government formation by secular forces," he said. "We have believed cooperation between the UF and Congress was necessary for a stable government."

But Mr. Vinagayamurthy declined to say how many members of the original UF alliance would agree to join a new coalition with the Congress as a member.

The Congress and Front have traded insults during the election campaign.

Fresh food blackmail case in Germany

STUTTGART, Germany (AFP) — Germany's Kaufhof Department Store chain bas become the latest victim in a spate of blackmail cases involving the poisoning of food products, a police spokesman said Wednesday.

Cartons of milk, suspected of being intentionally contaminated with toxic chemicals, were found in three supermarkets belonging to Kaufhof subsidiaries in Stuttgart.

According to the police spokesman, a mystery blackmailer has been demanding several million marks from Kaufhof since Jan. 19.

Police have urged consumers in Stuttgart to carefully examine any milk, yoghurt or cream cheese products purchased from Kaufhof, and to report any suspect goods.

Earlier this month, jars of baby food produced by a Stuttgart-based subsidiary of food giant Nestlé were found to have been injected with pesticide.

Another Nestlé subsidiary, Thomy, was the victim of a similar blackmail in April, 1996, forcing it recall tonnes of goods from around 50 supermarkets after some products were found to have been poisoned.

Meanwhile, the jam manufacturer Schwartau had to issue a public warning in December after several products were found to have been injected with a toxic chemical.

Police are still unsure if the cases are linked to a single blackmailer.

Mexico rearrests man accused of killing U.S. citizen

MEXICO CITY (AFP) — Mexico rearrested Tuesday a man who confessed to killing a U.S. citizen but was freed in a decision that angered the United States.

The news agency Notimex reported that Alfonso Gonzalez, known also as El Chuky, was detained on theft charges Tuesday.

He and three other men had been arrested on Dec. 30 for the murder of a U.S. businessman, John Peter Zarate, two weeks previously. The four had allegedly assaulted Zarate in a taxi.

Mr. Gonzalez was freed on Jan. 3 after criminal court judge, Maria Claudia Campuzano, ruled that there was insufficient evidence to hold him even though Mr. Gonzalez and his alleged accomplices had confessed. Judge Campuzano raised hackles by describing Mr. Gonzalez as a modern Robin Hood."

The decision angered the United States even though higher courts reviewed the decision and backed up Judge Campuzano.

Actress Geena Davis and Robert Rehme, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announce the nominees for Best Picture at the Academy's headquarters in Beverly Hills. The nominees are 'As Good As It Gets', 'The Full Monty', 'Good Will Hunting', 'L.A. Confidential,' and 'Titanic.' The Academy Awards will be presented March 23 in Los Angeles (Reuters photo)

Major studios roar to life in Oscar race

LOS ANGELES (R) — The major Hollywood studios roared back to life at the Oscar nominations Tuesday, making it unlikely that independent filmmakers will walk away with the lion's share of awards for a second consecutive year.

In 1997, so-called "Indie" films like "The English Patient" and "Shine" swept the academy awards in the top categories, leaving many in Hollywood wondering how they could win back the favour of audiences.

The answer in 1998: bigger can be better.

The $200 million epic "Titanic" tied the record for most nominations with 1950's "All About Eve", receiving a total of 14 Oscar nods, including best picture.

"Titanic" was distributed by two major studios, 20th Century Fox, which is owned by News Corp Ltd., and the Paramount pictures subsidiary of Viacom Inc. News Corp. took home a total 21 nominations and Paramount had 16.

The Walt Disney Co. topped the list of studios with the most nominations, garnering a total of 25. A combination of films from its Miramax division including, "Good Will Hunting," "The Wings of the Dove" and "Mrs. Brown" pushed Disney past News Corp. which was the second highest nominated studio.

Though Miramax has always operated in the independent movie arena, its ties to Disney help give it clout when it comes to signing major, up-and-coming stars, such as Matt Damon in "Good Will Hunting."

Buena Vista entertainment, another Disney Unit, received four nominations for "Kundun" and two for action movie "Con Air." Both are big budget films.

Warner Bros 1950s-style film-noir murder mystery "L.A. Confidential" took in a total of nine nominations to tie with "Good Will Hunting" as the second most nominated picture.

Films under the Time Warner banner received a total of 18 nominations. Warner is a unit of Time Warner Inc, the largest entertainment company in the world.

Sony Corp. movies pulled in 19 nominations, putting it third among its major rivals. The Sony group was led by "As Good As It Gets" starring Jack Nicholson, one of Hollywood's biggest names, and Helen Hunt, who stars in the TV comedy "Mad About You."

"As Good as it Gets" was the fourth most nominated movie with a total of seven.

Lastly Dreamworks, the newest studio in town, received four nominations, all for the Steven Spielberg-directed epic "Amistad.

Edmund Hillary in intensive care

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand (AFP) — Mount Everest conqueror New Zealand's Sir Edmund Hillary was Wednesday admitted to an intensive care ward of Christchurch Hospital.

Mr. Hillary was taken from the passenger ship Marco Polo when it docked here after a cruise of the Antarctic.

Christchurch Hospital said Mr. Hillary, 78, had requested privacy but confirmed he was suffering a lung infection and was admitted to the intensive care unit, but was later transferred to a general ward after his condition improved.

The hospital said he was resting comfortably.

His wife Mary, Lady Hillary, said she was relieved her husband was recovering.

With Sherpa Tensing Norgay, Mr. Hillary conquered Everest on May 29, 1953.

He has also been New Zealand's high commissioner to India and was actively involved in fundraising for the Sherpa people of Nepal.

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Georgia seeks handover of Russian wanted for assassination bid

TBILISI (AFP) — Georgia said Wednesday it would renew a request to Russia to hand over former security service chief Igor Giorgadze, linked to Monday's failed bid to kill President Eduard Shevardnadze and a previous attack.

Security remained tight in the capital two days after the Georgian leader narrowly survived a grenade and gun attack on his motorcade, with police sealing off the district where the assault took place and combing the area for clues.

Border patrols have also been stepped up, although the capital was calm and less tense than the previous day.

Public Prosecutor Dzhamlet Bahilashvili said he would write to his Russian counterpart asking for Mr. Giorgadze to be sent to Tbilisi.

The Georgian authorities accuse Mr. Giorgadze of being behind an August 1995 car bomb blast which came close to killing Mr. Shevardnadze. Mr. Giorgadze fled to Russia after the attack and is believed to be living in Moscow.

Despite repeated Georgian requests, the Russian authorities have so far failed to extradite the suspect, saying they have no idea of his whereabouts.

"This latest request from Georgia is perfectly legitimate and certain officials in the Russian security services should not block his extradition," Mr. Babilashvili said.

He said he hoped that the latest request would not meet with "an evasive and cynical response" from Moscow.

Mr. Shevardnadze Tuesday implicitly accused Russia of involvement in the attack, saying pointedly that "the fact that the organiser of the previous attack lives in Moscow and enjoys an easy life there encourages terrorism."

The discovery of a Russian passport on the body of the gunman killed in the attack "spoke volumes," he said, and hinted the attack may have been sparked by powerful Russian oil interests in competition with Georgia to ship crude oil from neighbouring Azerbaijan.

Foreign Intelligence Minister Avtandil Iosseliani said on Georgian television Wednesday that "there are many versions and we have not ruled out the version that implicates Igor Giorgadze.

"The fact that he is currently living in Moscow shows that they need him there. Why keep the author of an attack in Moscow?" he asked.

Meanwhile the leader of Georgia's National Democratic Party, Irina Sarishvili, slammed Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze over the attack.

"The interior minister did not contact the president until well after the attack and started taking measures when the president was out of danger. Either he's sick or he is not loyal to the president," she said on state television.

The Alya newspaper, citing a "we shall return" message in Georgian left in blood on a wall near the scene of the attack, said the armed gang wanted to harm relations between Tbilisi and Moscow and Russia's breakaway republic of Chechenya.

But Russia's Nezavisimaya Gazeta daily said the message showed the gunmen knew they would fail, as they would not have had time to daub the message during a gunfight.

Mr. Shevardnadze may have organised the attack himself, the paper said, adding: "We can only note that each time, after an attack, Mr. Shevardnadze comes out of it with his authority increased."

The influential newspaper Rezonans questioned how the Georgian secret services could have allowed the 10 to 15-member group that carried out Monday's attack to enter Georgian territory heavily armed and then escape.

The Syem Dnei daily said it could not rule out an "Abkhaz connection," a reference to Georgia's breakaway northern province.

The paper suggested that the Georgian-made grenades used in the attack had been stolen from the Georgian National Guard.

Other analysts have said the attack could have been the work of nationalist opposition elements opposed to Mr. Shevardnadze's moderate approach to Abkhazia and the presence of Russian troops stationed in Georgia.

No group has yet claimed the attack.

Marine charged in cover-up in Italian cable-car tragedy

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A U.S. Marine officer in command of a squadron of jets identical to the one that caused the cable-car tragedy in northern Italy was fired for asking his crew members to destroy evidence in the investigation, The New York Times said Wednesday.

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Watters was relieved of command Friday for asking that any videotapes of low-altitude flights in his squadron's EA-6B Prowlers be either erased or be turned over to him.

Crew members often take personal videotapes of their flights.

Quoting a U.S. Marine Corps statement issued late Tuesday, the daily said the information was based on a retired squadron member who was told of Col. Watters' request by an active crew member who attended his commander's briefing.

The U.S. Defence Department has admitted that the Feb. 3 accident that killed 20 people in a Dolomite Mountain valley in northeastern Italy was caused by a Prowler jet flying at below the minimum authorised altitude.

Col. Waters' squadron at Marine Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina, rotates with three other squadrons assigned to a NATO base in Aviano, Italy, where the cable-cutting Prowler was stationed.

U.S. President Bill Clinton has promised to fully investigate the accident, which caused some friction between Italy and the United States.

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Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585
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Why unleash the jinni?

THANKS ARE in order to the Nagano Winter Olympics for giving the countries and peoples of the Middle East a two-week respite from a certain-to-be devastating war, thus allowing more precious time to pursue peaceful efforts to resolve the Iraq crisis. It goes without saying that all the countries and peoples of the region will fall victim to the consequences of such a war. The negative effects will be felt in all vital spheres — political, economic, psychological and environmental. And the dangers will not be easy to contain. Other nations will surely be affected in one form or another. That is why Washington should think twice before it launches massive strikes against Iraq. The multi-dimensional repercussions from any such onslaught would be with us for a long time and could be more damaging and tronbling than what the projected armed conflict aims to accomplish.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently said her government has the "authority, responsibility and willingness" to unleash its full war machine against Iraq. Meanwhile, tbe world waits witb anxiety and fear.

There are two initiatives floating about to defuse the ticking time bomb of the standoff between Iraq and the U.S., one by the Arab League and the other by France. Of the two, the Frencb proposal appears to hold more promise because it was not rejected outright by tbe U.S. The French ideas should be pursued in a rational and sober manner.

All sides sbould beed the admonitions of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, who cautioned against military action and called on the U.S. to avoid "humiliating" the Iraqi people. "I think we all need to think through very carefully the consequences of military actions and what we do afterwards," Mr. Annan has said. "If we maintain fundamentalist positions all around, or purist positions, we will not find a solution, and I appeal for that kind of courage, that kind of wisdom, that will allow us to make the kind of judgements that will allow us to get out of this."

If Iraq indeed possesses the kind of chemical and biological weapons that we all fear, why then push the Iraqi regime up against a wall and force it to deploy these very same weapons that we are desperately trying to keep from being used?

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Samir Qtami said the U.S. has claimed it would direct its attack on sites which contain chemical and other weapons of mass destruction, but such an attack can only cause great danger to the Iraqi people and the countries around Iraq as well because the whole atmosphere will be contaminated. U.N. laws ban any attack on a site suspected to be containing such weapons for fear that the danger will spread to the civilian population, according to the writer. But the fact is that the U.S. realises that Iraq no longer possesses any weapons of mass destruction and its plans to attack are designed to devastate the Iraqi nation and dominate the whole Arab World and its oil wealth, Dr. Qtami said. He asked, now that Iraq has announced its acceptance of the U.S. demand that the presidential palaces be inspected, why is Washington threatening to wage war on Iraq? If the U.S. and the Western nations claim that they defend human rights, why are they threatening to annihilate the civilian population of Iraq, he also asked. He said, even if Iraq allowed the inspectors to search every inch of Iraq the U.S. would not lift the sanctions unless it secured full control over the country's oil wealth.

Al Dustour's Nawaf Zaru criticised the Arab and the Islamic countries, in particular Syria and Iran, for their present stand vis-a-vis the Iraqi crisis. Both Syria and Iran realise all too well that they are themselves targeted by Turkey and Israel which are backed by the U.S., and sooner or later their turn will come and they too will face aggression and possible disintegration, Zaru said. The writer said, when the aggressors are finished with Iraq they will turn to Syria and Iran which now maintain bostility towards Baghdad and the Iraqi people; and therefore they ought to take a very positive stand by deed rather than word in defence of the Iraqi nation. It is painful to see Iran preventing a Russian plane carrying parliament members with relief supplies from flying to Iraq, and it is painful to see Syria only paying lip service to Iraq, he said. It is in the interest of both Tehran and Damascus to take the lead and end the sanctions on Iraq and declare that they will confront any aggression on the Arab nation, the writer added. Zaru said Syria and Iran should stand in the forefront, exposing the American acts of terrorism and rallying the Arab and Islamic nations against the aggressors.

View from Academia

By Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

For lack of change

IN SOME ways, people in our part of the world are receptive to change; in some ways, our society as a whole is evolving at a reasonable pace, taking into account that it (our society) is, due to all sorts of crises (a favourite term with us) and setbacks, much like someone undergoing therapy and slowly being nursed back to health (this is the metaphor which many of us use). In other ways, they (people in our world) cling to old (and usually bad) babits so adamantly that you wonder wbether we are moving fast enough to catch up with the rest of humanity, many of whose societies are evolving so rapidly you can't believe it (and in ways that count, too).

The other day, I was at a bank standing in line when I recognised a supermarket owner from my neighbourhood (I assume he is the owner because I see him often giving orders to the employees or engaging in loud arguments with them about how they ought to conduct themselves). He was depositing change in the bank. It was 10:30 a.m. Business as usual. Right?

Well not exactly. A couple of days earlier, I saw this same person banding back money to shoppers, stating in a firm, condescending, authoritative, and final tone (you know, the tone of those who want to sound important in your presence): give me change; I do not have change. A couple of buyers were explaining in the usual apologetic (and pathetic) way, that sorry, they did not have change on them, they spent it all paying the "service driver," the baker, the butcher, the vegetable seller, the barber. "What can I do? Everybody wants change: wbere can I get you change?" be responded, as if the responsibility of providing change is theirs not his, and as if he were a department bead at one of our civil-service establishments looking into cbarity petitions or inspecting a tax form, and not a businessman.

I left, determined not to buy anything from this individual (wbo is in fact not just one individual, but a type, a sample, a specimen, and a phenomenon in our society), not to contribute to his welfare and prosperity in any way (from his outer appearance, he seems to be doing well, financially and health-wise — healthy and wealthy (but, obviously, not wise), in the words of good old Benjamin Franklin), and never to return to his shop, unless the Gulf war erupts again and his is the only shop open — which I doubt, I mean I doubt that his shop will be open under such circumstances, not I doubt that the war will (may) erupt.

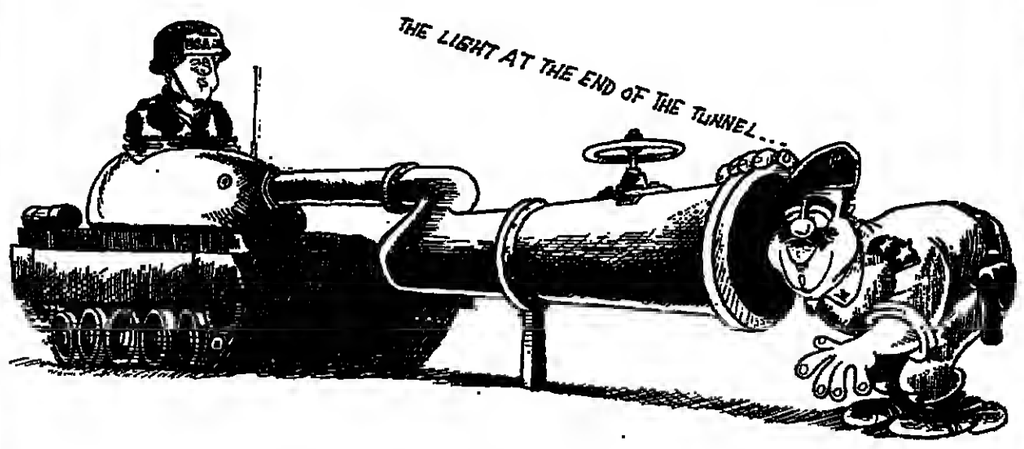
At the bank, he was handing the change (coins of all sorts and bills) to the teller. Why he was depositing the change in the bank so early in the morning (clearly the change be amassed from the previous day) and not saving any of it to use in his shop is beyond me. He was chatting with the teller, smiling, happy, content, polite, civil (though somewhat loud and pretentious) — as if this were not the same person I saw harassing customers so obooxiously and oot the same person bossing around his employees so rudely.

I will spare you comments on the inherent cootradiction (schizophrenia, even) io the very mentality, conduct, ideology, faith and ideals of many among us. I will also spare you comments about the abseoce of common sense in many of our dealings (is it really that difficult to keep some extra change handy so that cashiers use it when they run out of it?). And I will spare you comments on our lot and destiny in the tough days to come: the days of first-class customer service, competition, quality, distinction, etc. How can we compete with heroes (anti-heroes) like the person I have just described?

The anecdote I have told (and the many like it which we experience daily) speaks for itself. However, I cannot belp but wonder how we are going to affect real change (reform, development, progress, etc.) if we do not have the sense and the means to provide enough change for our cashiers so that they stop bassling customers.

Try to buy a newspaper and hand the shopkeeper a one-JD bill. Most often, be/she looks at you like you have committed one of the seven deadly sins? Before we speak about change (reform, development, progress, etc.), or while we speak about it, let's talk about providing change first. This may be easier.

M. KAHIL



Bill and Saddam: The problems with bluffs

By Gwynne Dyer

IT ISN'T working, is it?

U.S. President Bill Clinton claims that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has enough chemical and biological weapons to wipe out the world twice over. Various critics reply that every garden centre contains enough lethal chemicals to wipe out a large city — if you could get everybody to take exactly one spoonful. The problem is distribution, and Saddam Hussein can't distribute.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Clinton's loyal sidekick, helpfully warns a joint press conference that Saddam Hussein is "an evil dictator", and reporters respond by asking where Clinton has been putting his member recently. They know wbat sort of leader Saddam Hussein is — the same one he was when he was a U.S. ally against Iran — but they know of no clause in the U.S. consutution that mandates U.S. presidents to rid the world of "evil dictators."

The U.S. government puts out reassuring statements about how precision bombing can get Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" without harming a hair on the bead of a single civilian Iraqi. Whereupon General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of 'Desert Storm' in 1991, goes on NBC television and says that "we run the risk of doing the same thing we did to North Vietnam," wbere bombing was escalated eodlessly without achieving either military or political goals. (And the North Vietnamese won, in the end.)

How Clinton must long for the 19th century, when Britisb Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston would send a gunboat to chastise some wayward oriental potentate, and the whole British press would rally loyally around. Nobody would inquire if he had an "exit strategy." (He usually didn't, and it often ended up being a horrible mess, but at least it was fun in the early stages.)

One feels a certain sympathy for U.S. planners, because the impertinent mass media of the late 20th century have made the fine old diplomatic tool of bluff almost unusable. If a government has no viable strategy for victory and is hoping to win by mere bluster, various "experts" will soon be making that fact plain to the whole world.

So wby are we on the brink of a very large aerial bombing campaign against Iraq? Because people running big, powerful countries like the United States simply cannot believe that their military power does not always enable them to coerce weaker opponents, and because it is human nature to bluff.

Unfortunately, media questioning of unsound strategies is often countered by escalating government rhetoric about the scale of the threat and the need for a massive response. (Russian President Boris Yeltsin's recent remark that "Clinton is behaving too loudly" was right on the mark.)

In the end, the bluffers end up painting themselves into a corner with their toogues. That is where the U.S. government is now, and in order to save face it probably will start bombing Iraq. This is stupid, and nobody understands that more clearly than the man who represents the biggest Iraqi oppositioo group: Dr. Ahmed Chalabi, president of the Iraqi National Congress.

"Everyone says Saddam is boxed in," said Chalabi last week, "but it is the Americans and British who are boxed in by their refusal to support the idea of political change in Iraq. The consequences of that are disastrous. People should read Clausewitz: 'War is policy by other means.' But what is the policy here?"

What indeed? Simply bombing Iraq, without committing ground forces, offers little chance of getting the chemical and biological weapons Saddam Hussein may have hidden away, and no chance of overthrowing the dictator himself. Yet Washington has sworn not to use ground troops, and denied itself the goal of seeking Saddam's overthrow.

All the United States wants (so it says) is that Saddam Hussein let the arms inspectors of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) go anywhere in Iraq in order to track down and destroy his weapons of mass destruction. But if it won't invade, and it won't try to overthrow him, where's the pressure on him to comply?

"Military actioo alone will not remove Saddam," observed Chalabi. "It will not remove the weapons of mass destruction. It will give (Saddam Hussein) the excuse to throw out UNSCOM. And thousands of Iraqis will die. Saddam Hussein will make sure they will, so be can get sympathy."

The basic problem now is the same as in 1991. The U.S. State Department no longer treats Saddam Hussein as a de facto ally (as it did during the war caused by his invasion of Iran in the 80s), but it still wants a strong and united Iraq as a bulwark against "revolutionary" Iran. Given the diverse ethnic and religious make-up of Iraq, Washington believes that Iraq's unity can only be preserved by a Sunni Arab dictator with military backing.

The United States would prefer an Iraqi military dictator who was less fierce than Saddam Hussein, and less apt to invade his neighbours — but if it can't be sure of replacing Saddam Hussein with another man just like him, only nicer, then it will stick with the devil it knows. Since Saddam Hussein knows all this too, it was foolish to try to bluff him, and now the price must be paid.

What would be the minimum price of a large-scale aerial campaign against Iraq? Saddam Hussein would be strengthened, the United Nations would be sidelined and humiliated, Arab regimes friendly to the U.S. would be seriously weakened, and Washington would end up with egg on its face. And, of course, a certain number of innocent Iraqis would be killed.

The maximum prices could include: rejectioo of the SALT 2 Treaty (which seeks to control much more serious weapons of mass destruction) by a Russian parliament fed up with U.S. high-handedness; a protracted 'North Vietnam'-style U.S. air war against Iraq; the definitive end of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; and chemical or biological missiles on Riyadh and Tel Aviv.

And they know all that before they start.

LETTERS

Stressing on accuracy

To the editor:

REFERENCE IS made to the article, "Activist's summons on slander charges highlights issue of pollution in Fuheis," (Jordan Times, Jan. 14, 1998).

In the first instance, I would like to point out that the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) has been involved in monitoring and assessment of suspended particulate levels in Fuheis since 1992.

The writer of the article sbould have investigated and validated the assertions and information provided by the interviewees regarding the accuracy of the results and the technology employed in place by RSS in monitoring air pollution in Fuheis. I stress that the equipment possessed by RSS to monitor air quality in Fuheis and elsewhere in the Kingdom is modern, sophisticated, and remarkably accurate. Such equipment is manufactured and used according to international standards and norms, and is presently utilised by environmental protection agencies worldwide.

Where future articles involving RSS activities are concerned, it is advisable and recommended that the writer contact the relevant department at RSS prior to publishing any information that could mislead or appear biased to the reader.

Dr. Said Allousb
President
Royal Scientific Society

'Scientific evidence'

To the editor:

I AM not usually in favour of commenting in the press on subjects whicb should be debated upon in scientific forums, as this practice tends to create confusion amongst readers rather than clarify the topic under discussion. However, as recently there bas been a series of letters to the editor regarding the restoration of the entrance hall to the Umayyad Palace of Jabal Al Qal'a, an intervention of which I am in charge, I feel that it is necessary for me to make several points, especially as regards the document written by Dr. Alastair Northedge (Jordan Times, Dec. 29, 1997).

I understand that there may be discrepancies as to the decision to cover, protect and utilise the large entrance hall of the palace. Undeniably, architectural restoration work requires solutions of architectural design which are subject to criticism.

The fact that Dr. Northedge may disagree with a certain scientific theory is also understandable. Indeed, such discrepancies often favour scientific progress. However, what lacks scientific principle is the fact that Dr. Northedge cbooses to question the scientific evidence which has been proven and confirmed by a number of different scholars, among whom are included Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, without even first bothering to confirm them personally in the monument where they are conserved "in situ." The sills of the windows discovered on the northern side of what was undoubtedly the starting point of the original dome may be seen from the terrace of the building.

Regarding the proposal of covering the space with a plastic or glass roof, instead of with a wooden dome, it should be pointed out that said solution may not in any way be considered neutral or exempt from prejudices, as it would most necessarily promote the idea of an open space through which light could enter, which is precisely that which, contrary to evidence, is maintained by Dr. Northedge. This is precisely the solution which is adopted when covering a patio in order to preserve its essence. In this case, evidence points to the existence of an opaque cover which must have been a dome, which was likely made of stone, as are the two semicupulas covering the two lateral spaces on either side of the hall.

The solution which has been adopted cannot be erroneous, as it involves the use of modern techniques which are entirely different from those which could have been used in the 8th century A.D. The objective is, therefore, to protect the building while promoting its utility, and finding the most plausible way to insinuate the original construction. The project has been developed in a cooperation programme between Spain and Jordan whose objective is to promote Jabal Al Qal'a as a cultural and tourist ceotre in harmony with the great city of Amman.

It is comprehensible that Dr. Northedge may be concerned that his theories regarding the palace, sucb as that dealing with the different periods of its construction, which has been maintained despite our studies which have been completely confirmed through research that is about to be published, are groundless. However, that is the risk that one takes when theorising on subjects which others study more directly and with greater dedicatioo. Theories which are launched without adequate supporting data are usually regarded unfounded.

Antonio Almagro
Vice-Director of the School of Arab Studies
CSIC, Granada, Spain.

Society on the move

Priorities take precedence

As this week came to a close discussions in various settings began to pitch about the "impending" U.S.-led strike on Iraq.

In one setting, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali presented a lecture Wednesday night, at the World Affairs Council, following a meeting of its board of directors. Dr. Majali, who also is chairman of the council, briefed the board and other council members on the latest developments in the U.N.-U.S.-Iraq crisis following his own meetings on Tuesday with His Majesty King Hussein. The unpublicized lecture was held in a closed session.

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THE DEBTE MAGNET: *Political debate of the crisis was spread as well at Al Hersh Diwan, the central family hate where Hamas representative Mohammad Nazal in week received condolences on the death of his father. There, a small group of mourners engaged in a discussie involving differing positions on the issue. Some were certain that Iraq would come under military fire by the U. and its allies, others said the crisis was simply a scheme to "re-polish" Saddam Hussein and to reinstate hinas the "number one" Arab leader capable of defying th U.S. Drawn into the debate were Hussein Mjeli, hend f Jordanian Bar Association, attorney Faris Nabulsi, foner Hamas politburo head Dr. Musa Abu Marzouk, rrrent politburo leader Khaled Misha'al, Hamas spoesperson Ibrahim Ghoshch, and Mohammad Nazal himslf, while hundreds of mourners gathered to pay their rpects to the Nazal family.*

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OFF THE CHARTS: *Rumblings about a Cabinet reshuffle quieted. In a week that even heard speculation about a new government being formed altogether, names such as foner Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh; three-time former minister Awad Khleifat and Amman Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi were surfacing as "possible candidates" for the seat of premier. As quickly as speculations in that arena were put on a back burner, so too was talk of a reshuffle. The more immediate issue of the Baghdad-Washington stand-off has upstaged all the talk of ministry combining, ministers in and ministers out, for the time being.*

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ONE MORE TIME FOR THE CAMERAS: *Taking centre stage on Tuesday was the arrival to Amman of European Commission President Jacques Santer. Mr. Santer, who was in Jordan to discuss the EU's role in the region, was scheduled to arrive at Amman's Marka Airport from Tel Aviv at 9:30 A.M. Lo and behold, his plane touched down at around 8:30 A.M. No one was there to meet him, and possibly realising the situation, Mr. Santer waited. Forty-five minutes intermission, enter, Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh and the ambassadors of the EU troika, Christopher Battiscombe of the U.K., Bernard Bajolet of France, and Francesco Cerulli of Italy, as well as the head of the European Commission Delegation in Jordan Yves Gozzo. A good sport, Mr. Santer, after preliminary welcomes and apologies from his hosts, graciously played along to re-enact his arrival for the sake of television coverage. With all players in their places, it was lights, camera, action!*

Crown Prince Hassan greets European Commission President Jacques Santer at the end of a press conference at Basman Palace on Tuesday. (Reuters photo)

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ON THE JOB: *Two more Jordanian ambassadors have had their tenures extended. They are Shaher Beq, ambassador to South Africa, and Awad Abu Obeid, ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

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PORT OF CALL: *Another official of the Aqaba Regional Authority has springboarded to a key post. ARA Secretary General Muzahem Mhaisen has been appointed secretary general of the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications. Candidates to replace him are said to include Royal Yacht Club Director Mohammad Balaaz, and Deputy Director of the Arab Maritime Bridge Company Akef Abu Tayeh.*

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PROMOTED: *At the Natural Resources Authority, Kais Qaisi, an engineer who has been serving at the NRA's assistant director general, has been promoted to director general.*

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SPECIAL REQUEST: *An Iranian parliamentary delegation arriving in Jordan next week has asked for arrangements to present public lectures. During their stay in the Kingdom they are scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi, Senate Speaker Zaid Rifai, House Speaker Saad Hayel Sirour and other officials. Their proposed lectures are meant to elaborate on the new trends in Iran's policies since the election of President Mohammad Khatami.*

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SPLITTING AT THE SEAMS: *Party politics predicts another major defection from the National Constitutional Party, headed by Abdul Hadi Majali, deputy from Karak. Following the earlier resignation of party chairman Akef Fayez, a senator, and last week's pull out of Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh, Lower House member from Irbid, observers say that now key party member Hikmat Khair may also jump ship. Should that happen, they say, the party which pooled together nine political parties under one roof, may well fragment into many more than the original nine.*

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Careful out there this weekend — it's Friday the 13th.

Jennifer Hamarneh

Testing programmes on 'guinea pigs'

chip talk

By Jean-Claude Elias

HAPPY AS we may be, using these so-called friendly personal computers, we're probably too busy learning how to use them or fighting with them, to notice that the software industry is simply taking us for its guinea pigs.

Certain facts are hard to believe. This typical disclaimer by Corel can be found with their CorelDraw CD: "The programme is provided as is, without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. ... The entire risk as to the quality and performance of the programme is with you. Should the programme prove defective, you (and NOT Corel or an authorised representative) assume the entire cost of all necessary servicing, repair or correction."

And we all, including the writer of this column, accept these terms.

Microsoft, Lotus and virtually all software manufacturers display similar statement, preferably printed in microscopic characters, with their programme disks.

How do we, how can we accept such terms?

Computer programmes are very important products. They do not only cost money when purchased, they also require precious learning time and effort. The purpose they are used for is also dear to the users. Errors in software – bugs, as they are called – can therefore be very costly to us. The price we sometimes pay in lost productivity and wasted time cannot be estimated. And yet we bravely dive and do it again and again. Producing absolutely bug-free software has become very difficult if not impossible, given the huge size and the level of complexity modern programmes have reached. Of course some bugs are less acceptable than others.

Microsoft Windows 95 operating system for example is known to have minor bugs, but none that would prevent its main part from working smoothly.

The saddest part of the story is not the absence of warranties on software or the presence of bugs per se. It's that the industry, knowing the weakness of their products is counting on us to test them, give their feedback and allow it to fix them. Whereas a number of PC users, mainly the computer professionals, are aware of this unusual situation, the vast majority hasn't the faintest idea of how it is being used. This majority trusts the goodwill of the manufacturers. Besides, PC users are known to be ready to do anything to get their hands on new software. It's an obsession and they just love it.

A no warranty disclaimer would never stop them.

Some analysts argue that this is the only way software can progress. It must be tested by the largest possible number of users. One wonders, however, whether programmes that are not yet in their final, bug-free stage shouldn't be distributed free-of-charge. To say the least, it appears as a monstrous contradiction that the industry that admits to selling products with flaws is the one that is reaping the biggest profits.

It must be said that software is first released in what is called a "beta" version, for users to try. This declared test version — i.e., with guinea pigs knowing they are being used — may contain some serious bugs that would be totally unacceptable. Once these critical errors are corrected, the final version that theoretically should be completely bug-free, is released. Unfortunately very few, if any, so-called final versions of any programmes are truly clear of errors. This is precisely the main complaint of all guinea pigs.

Ministry readies for children's song festival

By Jumana Abu Hannoud
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Ministry of Culture recently invited Arab cultural attachés in Jordan to chart a strategy for the Fourth Arab Children's Song Festival, to be held in Amman Sept. 28 - Oct. 10 under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Noor.

Attachés from 12 Arab embassies attended the meeting, held early to ensure increased participation this year in contrast to previous lacklustre turnouts, organisers said.

According to festival director Wafa' Goussous the competition is open to adult participants from all Arab countries who are interested in writing songs targeting children in the pre-school age group.

She said the organisers preferred the sungs to be written for this age group because one of the goals of the competition is to increase research and production in this field.

Ms. Goussous told the Jordan Times that entries should be sent in on a cassette tape, accompanied by the written lyrics and music. Around 150 local children will participate in singing and dancing to the music, which will be played by the National Music Conservatory Orchestra.

A prize of JD500 is awarded for the best Jordanian song and contestants with the winning songs receive cash prizes, she said. Additional trophy and prize are given in the name of the children.

"The songs from each country could preserve a regional flavour in order to provide variety in the competition," said Ms. Goussous. "The songs should be written in simple standard Arabic using oriental and Arabic musical chords in an attempt to keep children in tune with Arab identity and heritage."

She said that among the other rules of the competition the songs should not fail to acknowledge the rights of girls under the umbrella of children's rights. They should also tackle general, national, social, educational and environmental issues concerning children.

The festival was first started in 1994 as a local show and developed in the following years to include other Arab countries in the form of a competition, added Ms. Goussous.

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3- Sales Engineer

- B.Sc. or higher university degree in Engineering, Architecture or Computer Science.
- One year minimum experience in sales required.
- Good AutoCad skills.

4-Accountant

- University graduate.
- At least three years experience.

5- Executive Secretary :

- High school diploma.
- Secretarial course from a reputable institute.
- 3 years experiene.
- Good command of English Language.
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Foreign investment in Israel jumps despite crisis in peace process

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Foreign investment in Israel jumped 44 per cent last year to $3.9 billion, confounding predictions that the crisis in the peace process would scare investors from the country, an official said.

Direct investment in the form of foreign purchases of Israeli companies rose to $1.8 billion last year from $1.3 billion in 1996, said the official, providing figures ahead of their formal publication by the Bank of Israel next week.

Purchases of shares in Israeli firms on the New York or Tel Aviv stock exchanges rose from $1.4 billion to $2.1 billion over the same period, he said on condition of anonymity.

In Tel Aviv, total foreign stock holdings reached $4.8 billion, 12 per cent of the market capitalisation.

The official said the foreign investment picked up pace during the second half of the year, leading forecasters to predict a further rise during the current year helped by falling inflation.

"The foreign interest is a sign of confidence in the Israeli economy," he said.

Investors were most attracted to Israel's high-technology sector, primarily electronics, computer software and Internet technologies.

According to official figures, Israel came in third behind Canada and Britain in the amount of money invested by U.S. capital risk funds which specialise in small high-tech companies. The funds invested $443 million in Israel last year.

"The political situation has had almost no impact since most investments come from multinational companies which have made a strategic choice to invest in Israel," said Ifat Rosenblum, an official in the ministry of industry and trade.

"For small and medium-sized businesses on the other hand the poor state of the peace process could have a negative effect on investments in Israel," she said.

Among the more active foreign players in the stock market in Israel are major investment houses like Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers, Morgan Stanley, Goldman-Sachs and the French bank Societe Generale.

Companies which have established themselves in Israel or bought into local firms include Siemens and Deutsche Telekom of German, France's Danone and Publicis, Johnson and Johnson and Cylink of the United States, Canada's Northern Telecom and operations run by billionaire businessman George Sorros.

The investment crush was fueled in part by a series of major privatisations in the banking sector, including a $1 billion purchase by Jewish-American financier Ted Arison into Hapoalim, the country's biggest bank.

This year the government plans to shed more state firms, notably the telecommunications company Bezek, which should continue to draw foreign interest despite a broader slowdown in domestic economic activity.

According to the Bank of Israel, the economy will grow by barely two per cent this year, down from 4.5 per cent in 1996 and six per cent per year in the early 1990's.

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A dynamic secretary with the following qualifications:

- Fluent in English (reading & writing is a must).
- Should be able to take dictation freely.
- Shorthand is a plus.
- Computer knowledge & skills is a must.
- New graduate with limited experience may be accepted if candidate has the potential to work hard and learn.

Salary & package offered shall be discussed after the interview and salary & benefits shall improve gradually according to performance and progress of the employee.

Interested candidates should send their CV and all relevant documents to the following address so as to be called for interview:

P.O. Box 830440 Amman
11183 Jordan
Attn. Personnel Manager

Arab fund lends Egypt $20m

ABU DHABI (AFP) — An Arab fund created six years ago to support flagging inter-Arab trade agreed Wednesday to provide a loan of $20 million to Egypt to finance commercial deals with other Arab states.

The Arab Trade Fund Programme (ATFP) said it signed the loan agreement with the Egyptian Al-Ahli Bank, which represents Cairo in the Abu Dhabi-based fund.

The credit will be used in financing around 85 per cent of commercial transactions between Egypt and other member states, it said in a statement.

ATFP has a capital of $500 million, of which half was subscribed by the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund and the rest by other regional financial institutions and banks.

Russia, Italy sign Fiat car deal

ROME (AFP) — Russian and Italian businessmen signed an agreement Wednesday under which Fiat will invest $850 million and build 150,000 cars per year in Russia.

The deal with the Russian auto group Gaz was signed in the presence of Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi.

Fiat is the first Western industrial group to set up a production site in Russia, at Nijni Novgorod (formerly Gorky), 450 kilometres (275 miles) east of Moscow.

Gaz expects the Fiat investment to result in 4,000 jobs at the plant that will turn out Palio, Palio Weekend and Marea models — the latter to be produced as early as the end of this year.

Initially the cars will be built from parts imported from Italy, but plans call for all components to be manufactured at Nijni Novgorod.

Gaz, the Russian acronym for Gorky Automobile Factory, has since the demise of the Soviet Union become a joint-venture company, in which Moscow remains the majority shareholder.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) It's a good afternoon to go shopping, if you can find the energy. It looks like you'd rather just take off early on your weekend jaunt. That could prove more expensive than you'd planned. Better check on your motel reservations and other little details.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're able to learn more quickly than usual. Information just sticks to your brain. So study something your boss or professor has been trying to teach you. A loved one can help. He or she may not have complete mastery of the subject yet, but the insights will be priceless.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) It looks like you could pull off the deal of the century if you got insider information and tried something unusual. You might be able to wrangle an unconventional loan. If you don't bave somebody helping you with a real estate deal, start investigating one. He or she will most likely be a Libra.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Handle business this morning. This evening, you're going to want to relax at home. A nice meal, good music and perbaps a soak in the hot tub will make this a memorable Friday nigbt. If your sweetheart has other plans, let him or her go without you. An occasional abseoce does make the heart grow fonder.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Conditions are hectic this morning, but you'll get the most creative work done then. Meet with friends later in the day. A party would be a good way to relax and renew your energy. In fact, it's a good weekend to party, from tongiht clear through Sunday.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Your luck changes for the worse as your day progresses. There's a whole lot to do. Scan over your lists first thing this morning. Sort out those little pieces of paper in your pockets, too. A couple hours spent getting organised this morning could really save your bacon later in the day.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) This is easy, but don't get lazy. You're going to bave to perform up to the standards you've already set for yourself. Better check your caleodar again. If you miss this meeting, you'll be in trouhle. It looks like there might be quite a hit of money involved.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You and your partner had better have a meeting this morning. You're going to have to shell out some money later in the day, so you need to agree on priorities. If either of you spends the money without the other's approval, it could make the mutual purchase impossible.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Conditions for travel look excellent through Sunday. How long bas it beeo since you and your sweetheart bad a romantic cruise? If you can't afford the Princess line, a sailboat will do. If you can't even manage a rowboat, don't let that stop you. There's some sort of cruising you can do this weekend.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) This weekend you'll he even more romantic than usual. If you don't have a sweetheart, consider somebody you've always thought of as a good friend. There might be a difference in your ages, hut that's OK. It's the level of communicatioo that counts.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'd like to spend the whole day in fascinating conversation. Instead, you're going to have to take care of business. Consider the possihilities and make the best decision. It won't be easy, hut it could hring you fame as well as fortune.

PISCES: (February 20 to Marcb 20) If you push yourself hard this morning, you might get out early. It'll definitely be worth the effort. You work harder than three or four people most of the time, so why not allow yourself to relax harder than three or four people as well? Go for it.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Ask a Libra friend out to dinner. If you don't have a one, just ask the most attractive person you know. The combination with your sign and Libra is very complimentary. With your hyperactivity, you can both burn off those extra calories. Get out there and play!

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Your boss or an older person is in a generous mood. Watch out for one who wants to pay you with advice instead of cash, though. Don't take any IOUs. Meanwhile, value your sweetheart's advice highly. He or she can see something you're missing.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You can't stand it when people heat around the hush. Today, all you'll have to do is ask! If you seem to be getting contradictory answers, don't back off. Just point that out and keep after it until you get the wbole story. This could be very entertaining.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You'll have to stay on your toes to keep ahead of the action today. Instead of getting frustrated, offer some guidance. You can figure out what the objective is, and the best route to get there. In other words, yon're the navigator. Don't just sit there and be a passenger in life today.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) If you don't have a marvellous time today, it's your own fault. Everyone you know will be enjoying themselves. It's an excellent day for group activities and meetings. Keep people focused on the subject at hand. Even big changes will be easy with the conditions that are in effect rigbt now.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Information from a private source might not be right. The person who's passing along the gossip got it from somebody else, and you know how those things go. You're pretty good at dishing innuendoes yourself. So don't pass along any information you're not certain about. And don't pay mucb attention to anything you be hear either.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You're in for a very interesting day. Your competition bas the advantage. Instead of getting into a fight you can't win, go into the situation with bat in hand. If you take this stance in a confrontational situation, you'll learn something valuable and make a good impression on the other person.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) If you don't bave any investments, it's time you got some. Things are changing all around you. That's all the more reason to think about your security. Focus on long-term goals today. Otherwise, you're liable to spend everything you've got on something you want now. Resist the temptation.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Somebody's trying to talk your ear off. He or she wants to sell you something. There's only one thing to keep in mind. If this item is going to hring you more money, it's good. If it's going to cost you more money, it's bad. Make that clear and you'll shorten the conversation considerahley.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You may have to go farther than you expected to get what you want. If it's not available in the local store, try checking the catalogs. Actually, it may not even have been invented yet. Not to worry. Things are changing so fast that it'll prohably be here soon.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) There is change in the air. You're lucky, forceful and dynamic. You're also good-looking. So what have you got to worry about? Absolutely nothing! Make your life into what you've always wanted it to be. Toss out the whatever doesn't work and get on to whatever does. You know which is which.

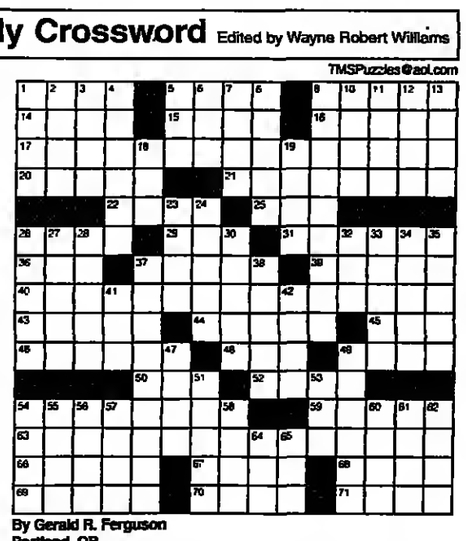
PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're attractive to a person whom you find attractive. The two of you might be ahle to get together for lunch or dinner. The conversation you get into could have interesting side effects. Something that starts out as a friendship could easily levelop into more.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



ACROSS
1 Transmit
5 Wise Men
9 Seem suitable
14 Dueling sword
15 Norse Zeus
16 Of sheep
17 One's cronies
20 Twenty
21 Streetcars
22 Use acid for art
25 Mooncalf
26 Small valley
29 Down in the dumps
31 Trip in the bush
36 Rhoda's TV mother
37 Corday's victim
39 __ and dined
40 Area of the Atlantic
43 The King
44 Tale
45 Pasture in poetry
46 Ocean breeze
48 Totality
49 Gardener's tools
50 Foldaway bed
52 Bring to heel
54 Borrower's opposite number
59 Seudis and traqis
63 Oine well
66 For the birds?
67 Do-others separator
68 Jason's galley
69 Narrates
70 Diminutive ending
71 News-hound's organ

DOWN
1 Brief time periods
2 Cast-of-thousands pic
3 Claudius' nephew
4 Court judgment
5 One of the Stooges
6 Brouhaha
7 Talent
8 Structure starter?
9 Evaporates
10 First name in daredevils
11 Okay
12 500-mile race, for short
13 Hardy heroine
18 Permit
19 Singer Diana
23 Oressed (in)
24 Israeli dances
26 Psychic's sensations
27 Fred's first partner
28 Newly-hatched stage
30 Power units
32 Fiver
33 __-Saxon
34 U.S. Grant's opposite number
35 Brainstorms
37 Band members
38 Brook fish
41 POW possibly
42 "__ la Douce"
47 Goes bad
49 Melville or Wouk
51 Close-fitting hat
53 Dancer Murray
54 Conversation
55 Speak incoherently
56 Depraved
57 Settlement
58 Pip-squeak
60 Dynamic starter?
61 Sacks
62 Blackthorn berry
64 Gate fig.
65 Lobster eggs

By Gerald R. Ferguson
Portland, OR

L	A	W	S		J	U	M	P		E	O	G	E	D
E	R	I	K		O	H	I	O		M	E	R	R	Y
N	I	L	E		C	U	E	S		I	M	A	G	E
O	E	M	I	J	O	H	N	S		L	I	O	O	S
L	L	A	N	O	S			E	X	I	T			
				L	E	A	O		M	O	A	N	E	O
V	E	I	O	T		A	O	N	E		S	E	A	R
E	R	N	E		B	R	Y	A	N		S	A	R	A
R	O	O	M		A	P	E	O		W	E	T	L	Y
B	O	N	I	E	R		N	A	T	O				
			M	A	T	E			O	R	O	A	I	N
B	E	F	O	G		O	E	M	I	M	O	N	O	E
E	R	R	O	L		W	A	I	L		U	K	E	S
S	N	A	R	E		I	S	L	E		S	L	A	T
T	O	N	E	D		N	E	E	O		E	E	L	S

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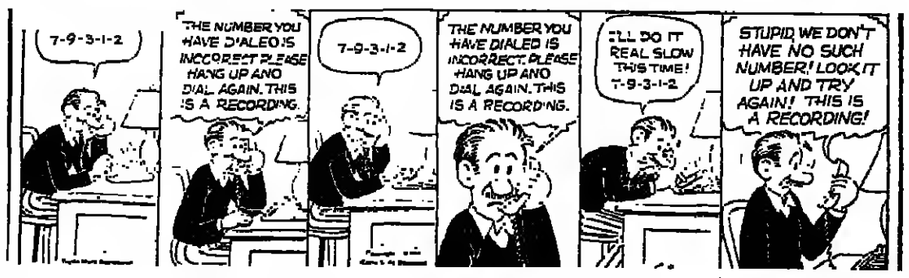
Peanuts

Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF®

By Glasbergen

"I need you to give me some good advice, so I wrote down exactly what you should say."

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

RACHI

VEALE

MEECBO

NIGINN

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: HER

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: IMBUE OKEN LIZARD PURIFY
Answer: What the testing mechanics considered their coffee — "BREAK" FLUID

Citizens, businesses made to wait for benefits of euro

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Citizens and businesses in the EU countries that enter monetary union next year could still face hefty charges for changing money between them for a further three years under plans outlined here Wednesday.

In a report on the practical preparations for the expected switchover from as many as 11 national currencies to the euro, the European Commission said it saw no case for legislation to prevent banks charging commissions on cross-border transactions within the euro-zone.

The problem arises because of the gap between the January 1, 1999 move to fixed exchange rates and the actual introduction of the euro notes and coins, three years later.

In the interim period, a German who spends his holidays in France will still have to buy francs to cover everyday expenses, incurring the kind of transaction costs that the single currency is supposed to do away with.

It is not just tourists who will fail to reap the full benefit of the euro immediately.

Most major European companies are expected to start billing and accounting in euros from next year. But for smaller companies the costs involved in adopting dual-accounting could make this impractical.

As a result they could still be exposed to the high costs associated with international money transfers that have long been identified as a key weak point in the EU single market.

EU Finance Commissioner Yves Thibault de Silguy dismissed fears that the euro would bring no immediate, tangible benefits.

Banks could no longer legitimately impose charges at their current level because they would no longer have the risk of the currencies moving up or down, he said.

Even if they wanted to, the "snowball effect," of competition would ensure they did not. "Once one bank cuts its rates to a certain level, the others will have to follow," he said.

Under existing plans, euro notes and coins are due to be introduced on January 1, 2002 and to circulate alongside national currencies for a six-month transitional period.

De Silguy said there was now a growing consensus that the period should be cut to a matter of weeks. "The shorter the changeover period the better in terms of costs for banks and confusion for the consumer."

The commission also said it saw no need for legislation to ensure consumers do not face any charges in 2002, when they will be obliged to change all their money from francs, marks or guilder to the euro.

Instead it intends to publish a "standard of good practice" based on the principle that there should be no charges for obligatory changes. The banking sector has already indicated that customers will not be charged for changing their money to euros.

The commission also said it would publish guidelines for shops that want to display prices in both national currencies and euros between 1999-2002.

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates — Prices as at 11/02/98 19:08

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8194	0.6124	1.4529	123.55	1.4352	1796.25	2.0497	6.0965
DE Mark	0.5496	-	0.3364	0.8047	67.98	0.7887	987.55	1.1271	3.3520
GB Sterling	1.6330	2.9715	-	2.3897	201.57	2.3437	2931.12	3.3447	9.9468
CH Franc	0.6838	124.23	0.4180	-	84.40	0.9799	1226.70	140.02	4.1525
JP Yen	0.0081	1.4713	0.4951	1.1837	-	1.1607	14.53	165.85	4.9300
CA Dollar	0.6968	1.2479	0.4186	1.0112	1.10	-	1231.91	1.4069	4.1831
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0123	0.3404	0.0814	1456.60	0.7986	-	11.41	3.3909
NL Guilder	0.4879	88.69	0.2984	71.39	50.23	0.6999	875.95	-	2.9719
FR Franc	0.1641	0.2980	0.1004	24.0089	20.26	0.2354	33.64	33.6400	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7505	0.3770	3.6408	0.3056	3.6727	1529.00	3.4098
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2898	0.5317	5.1301	0.4310	5.1801	2156.56	4.8093
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0815	0.98	407.68	0.9092
Bahrain Dinar	2.66	1.8807	9.9485	-	9.66	0.8106	9.74	4055.81	9.0448
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947	1.0301	1.0301	-	0.0839	1.01	419.98	0.9366
Kuwait Dinar	3.2723	2.3200	12.2726	1.2336	11.81	-	12.02	5003.27	9.9366
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	0.1026	0.9913	0.0832	-	416.31	0.9284
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4637	2.4529	0.2466	2.3812	0.1999	2.4020	-	2.2301
Egyptian	0.2933	0.2079	1.0999	0.1106	1.0677	0.0896	1.0771	448.41	-

Energy

Oils	Last	Previous
Brent	14.66	14.70
W. Texas	16.46	16.45
Bonny	14.55	14.70
Dubai	12.55	12.69
UL Gas	159.00	159.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4852	0.16328	0.3905	32.9680
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.49547	0.16674	0.39879	33.6678
KW Dinar	3.2723	5.95593	2.00401	4.79167	404.694
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.82625	1.62443	3.880	327.970
CY Pound	1.869	3.3988	1.1437	2.7346	230.922

Metal Prices

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	300.2	300.7
Silver (oz's)	7.11	7.13
Platinum (oz's)	391.5	393.0
AL (3 Months)	1501	1502
CU (3 Months)	1706	1709
Zinc (3 Months)	1085	1088
Lead (3 Months)	526	527
NI (3 Months)	5640	5650

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)

Period / Cncy	-1- Month	-3- Months	-6- Months	-9- Months	-1- Year
USD	5.60	5.50	5.53	5.57	5.60
GBP	7.38	7.41	7.40	7.19	7.34
JPY	0.43	0.44	0.45	0.41	0.44
DEM	3.19	3.42	3.54	3.63	3.68
FRF	3.70	3.47	3.54	3.62	3.80
CHF	0.84	0.94	1.13	1.19	1.45
ITL	6.14	5.98	5.55	5.38	5.15

Main Equity Indices

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls
NewYork	DOW JONES	8299.85	4.24	0.00	8314.55	8280.42	8295.01
Newyork	S&P 500	1019.11	0.1	0.01	1020.71	1017.4	1019.01
London	FT-SE 100	5594.9	-18.4	-0.33	5648.7	5591.3	5513.3
Tokyo	NIKKIE 225	0	0	0	0	0	17205.1
Paris	CAC 40	3237.87	2.11	0.07	3272.28	3230.78	3235.70
Frankfurt	DAX	4588.43	64.58	1.43	4597.29	4560.32	4523.70

Gulf crisis hits tourism

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — As the clouds of war thicken on the Gulf, Jordan's tourism industry has been hit by a storm of cancellations that will bear negative effects throughout the year, hoteliers and tour operators have said.

After hitting one million in 1995, one year after the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the number of tourists to the Kingdom continued growing, but at a reduced pace due to regional instability, to 1.127 million in 1997.

But, as the U.S.-Iraq stand-off over weapons inspections becomes more tense and Washington launched open threats of a military strike on Baghdad, tourists started cancelling their trips to Jordan and the region.

"Only in the past two-three days, we have received 350 room-night cancellations," Felix Hauser, general manager at the Radisson SAS Aqaba Resort told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

Echoing other hoteliers, Mr. Hauser said it was mainly European and American tourists who cancelled their stayings in the Red Sea port city.

Tour operators complained that cancellations were effected not only for the month of March, but also April and May.

Sami Sawalha, deputy president at the Jordan Hotels Association (JHA), pointed out that these cancellations assume even more importance should one consider that spring is high season for Jordan's tourism.

"In principle, any political problem in the Middle East means that the whole region is on the spot on the news," Mr. Sawalha said.

Many believe that the already low occupancy rate in Jordan's hotels, which, according to JHA figures, averaged 60 per cent last year, will further decrease.

At Jordan's national carrier, Royal Jordanian, Walid Muhajer from the marketing department said that also flight cancellations have been numerous, though no exact figures were available.

The capital's five-star hotels, however, are hoping to benefit from the high number of journalists that have already booked to be here in time for a possible military escalation.

At Hotel Inter.Continental Jordan, staff at the public relations department said they had already received bookings from international media organisations.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, the tourism sector earned $775 million last year, and economists have identified tourism as the major earner of foreign currency in the country.

CBJ forms 7-member board to formulate inter-banking dealings

AMMAN (J.T.) — The governor of the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ), Ziad Fariz, Wednesday announced the formation of a national board to formulate a national strategy to improve and upgrade inter banking system in the Kingdom.

The board will establish an advanced system for large transfers among commercial banks and between banks and third parties. It will also draw up proper strategies for risk management and an appropriate legal framework to help develop the transfer systems and methods.

The board, which is headed by Dr. Fariz, includes representatives from seven commercial banks and senior CBJ officials. The deputy governor of CBJ, Ahmad Abdul Fattah, was appointed vice-chairman of the board.

The board includes the manager of the Jordan Islamic Bank, the Cairo Amman Bank, the Arab Banking Corporation, Citibank, Jordan Arab Investment Bank, the Housing Bank, in addition to the regional director of the Arab Bank, the executive director of the CBJ's open market operations and general debt department, and the head of the computer department.

Bankers reacted to the formation of the board by describing it as a step forward on the path of developing the banking infrastructure to cope with the economic growth, and to push the wheel of economic progress forward.

This step is vital for accelerating economic activity and facilitating procedures at a time when the world is witnessing technological development and economic openness, one banker said.

Lower oil prices slash Gulf account surplus in 1997

ABU DHABI (AFP) — A decline in crude prices coupled with higher imports sharply depressed the current account surplus in Gulf Arab oil producers in 1997, an official report showed Wednesday.

The current account, which covers the difference between imports and exports of goods and services as well as transfers, is projected to have tumbled to only around $4 million in 1997 from $5.8 billion in 1996, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) said in its 1997 report about its member states.

The report, published in the United Arab Emirates daily Al-Bayan, also said that the trade surplus in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is expected to have receded slightly from its 1996 level of $49.9 billion, based on an oil price of between $17.5 and $19 and an increase of around seven per cent in imports.

The report showed that 1996 was one of the best years for the GCC countries — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the UAE — as oil prices surged to one of the highest levels since the oil boom 15 years ago.

The price of OPEC's basket of seven crudes averaged over $20 in 1996, boosting the combined GCC income to more than $80 billion. This compares with around $70 billion in 1995, when prices averaged $16.8.

Despite the sharp decline in 1997, the GCC current account remained in a better shape than in previous years as it suffered from a deficit of more than $30 billion in 1991 due to huge payments for the Gulf war.

The biggest beneficiary from high oil prices in 1996 was Saudi Arabia, with a deficit of $8.1 billion in its 1995 current account turning into a surplus of nearly $900 million, said ESCWA, which also groups Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and other Arab nations.

The figures showed the GCC's reserves remained at around $23.4 billion at the beginning of 1997. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounted for nearly two thirds, with $8.5 billion and $8 billion respectively.

The GCC, a loose economic, political and defence alliance created in 1981, controls nearly 45 per cent of the world's proven oil resources and produces around a fifth of the global crude supplies.

Oil exports provide the bulk of its income and this makes its economy vulnerable to crude price fluctuations.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE
TELEPHONE: 607171 - 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 11/02/1998

	PAST 12 MONTHS High	Low	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
	346.000	300.000	ARAB BANK	15.2	1.21	6	360	118960	330.00	330.50	.50+
N	2.360	1.000	JOR.NATIONAL BK.	E	0.00	10	34348	60445	1.76	1.75	.01-
*S	5.000	3.400	CAIRO AMMAN BANK	6.8	4.55	1	1000	3300	3.47	3.30	.17-
S	3.540	1.[illegible]	BANK OF JORDAN	4.4	0.00	3	500	691	1.42	1.39	.03-
	1.300	.900	MID.EAST INV.BK.	66.1	0.00	4	1800	1804	.97	1.01	.04+
S	2.680	1.[illegible]	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	10.2	6.14	10	34400	58427	1.70	1.70	-
	5.300	4.[illegible]	THE HOUSING BK.	14.9	3.38	9	21450	117280	5.09	5.00	.09-
S	4.180	1.850	JOR.KUWAIT BANK	10.3	0.00	3	548	1059	1.95	1.94	.01-
	.970	.600	JOR.GULF BANK	4.1	10.14	12	7990	5447	.70	.69	.01-
*S	4.050	2.240	JOR.ISLAMIC BANK	11.2	4.36	11	2550	5655	2.24	2.20	.04-
*S	3.900	2.180	JOR.INV.FIN.BANK	13.3	0.00	3	291	602	2.18	2.07	.11-
*N	2.350	1.670	JOR.INV.FIN.BANK/NEW	E	0.00	6	889	1600	1.87	1.80	.07-
*	1.620	.840	BEIT.AL-MAL (BEITHA)	.5	18.29	2	600	492	1.84	1.82	.02-
	BANK SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 231.91	CHG: -0.29		80	108726	375767			
I	2.120	1.590	JOR FRENCH INSUR.	6.1	6.94	3	5000	11005	2.10	2.16	.06+
	INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 121.22	CHG: -0.29		1	5000	11005			
	2.050	1.510	JOR.ELECTRIC PWR.	9.5	5.10	16	7704	14585	1.96	1.96	.01+
	1.550	.930	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	10	3500	3535	1.01	1.01	-
	1.490	1.150	MID. EAST HOTELS	18.4	0.00	3	2000	2420	1.23	1.21	.02-
	4.000	2.890	ARAB INTL.INV.EDUC.	10.3	0.00	7	2100	8242	3.90	3.93	.03+
	1.090	.900	JAPAN EDUCATION	9	0.00	8	7200	6701	.93	.93	-
	2.160	1.610	UNIFIED CO.	7.9	6.59	1	750	1254	1.68	1.67	.01-
+	.1140	.610	UNION LAND DEV.	9	0.00	1	100	60	.61	.60	.01-
	SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 115.66	CHG: +0.14		47	22954	36496			
+	4.450	2.750	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.4	4.01	7	4850	13376	2.78	2.74	.04-
	4.140	3.050	JOR.PHOSPHATE MINES	9.7	2.87	6	1844	6414	3.48	3.48	-
	11.160	9.200	JOR. PETROL.REFINARY	9.8	8.77	24	22185	224998	10.15	10.14	.01-
	2.890	1.780	INDUSTRIAL COMM.AGR.	9	0.00	2	1043	1333	1.29	1.28	.01-
	4.700	1.440	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	12.6	4.37	30	7644	35128	4.60	4.58	.02-
	2.940	2.700	JORDAN DAIRY	9.6	8.58	1	100	285	2.80	2.85	.05+
	6.000	4.400	DAR ALDAWA DV.INV.	14.3	4.29	8	4650	25898	5.84	5.83	.01-
+	.620	.420	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	8.7	0.00	5	2750	1145	.42	.41	.01-
	1.200	.680	ARAB PAPER CONV.TRD.	21.7	0.00	3	2250	1595	.68	.71	.03+
	.860	.510	NATIONAL INDS.	9	0.00	1	100	56	.57	.56	.01-
	1.120	.370	INTERMED.PETRO.CHEM.	9	0.00	4	442	177	.40	.41	.01+
S	3.000	.990	NATL.CABLE WIRE.MFAC	24.6	0.00	4	1850	1887	1.07	1.02	.05-
	.790	.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	9	0.00	11	4350	2440	.57	.55	.02-
	1.610	1.150	ARAB PHARM.CHEM.	15.3	5.83	2	500	600	1.21	1.20	.01-
S	1.800	.820	UNIV. MODD.INDS.	P	.26	7	3350	2776	.83	.83	-
	1.410	.690	JOR.INDS.RESOURCES	9.8	13.70	8	6737	4909	.74	.73	.01-
	1.620	1.350	NATL. CHLORINE	13.8	4.79	1	100	146	1.49	1.46	.03-
	.960	.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	16.5	0.00	2	1750	1525	.90	.90	-
	1.400	1.200	FL -ZAY READY WEAR	46.5	0.00	8	4164	5483	1.30	1.32	.02+
	1.280	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.6	0.00	12	52169	62965	1.20	1.20	-
	1.200	.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	42.4	0.00	9	6850	6966	.99	1.02	.03+
	.810	.680	JORDAN STEEL	30.8	7.35	4	7850	5338	.68	.68	-
	.840	.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	7.6	16.13	2	650	401	.62	.62	-
	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 110.01	CHG: -0.29		163	138148	405739			
	GRAND TOTAL		INDEX: 166.02	CHG: -0.26		293	274828	829007			

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 11/02/1998

	.610	.340	JOR.TRADE FAC.	9.9	0.00	7	14200	5253	.37	.37	-
+	.660	.600	NATL.COMMER.CENTERS	E	0.00	2	100	63	.66	.63	.03-
	.800	.460	UNION INV. 50%	9	0.00	19	37879	7575	.70	.70	-
	.620	.380	ARAB FIN.INVEST.	9	0.00	1	2150	1058	.47	.45	.02-
	.290	.140	JOR.INDS.MATCH-JEMCO	9	0.00	1	10000	1500	.16	.15	.01-
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	1.500	.860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	0.00	4	338	379	1.36	1.38	.02+
	.730	.550	RAZI PHARM.	E	0.00	1	250	168	.70	.67	.03-
	.470	.240	INDS. ENG.	9	0.00	2	600	157	.27	.27	-
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	.820	.490	NATL. POULTRY	E	0.00	4	2000	1040	.52	.52	-
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French qualifier puts out Maleeva

PARIS (AFP) — Emilie Loit, a French teenager ranked 234th who had to play in the qualifying event to get into the main draw, raised eyebrows at the Paris Indoor Open on Tuesday when she beat Bulgaria's Magdalena Maleeva in straight-sets.

The powerful 18-year-old left-hander from Cherbourg showed no respect for her experienced opponent's status as the world's 29th-ranked player and raced to a 6-0, 6-2 victory.

"I can't explain what happened," said a clearly shell-shocked Maleeva after her defeat.

"Physically I'm fine and I played pretty well in Tokyo last week when I beat Anke Huber in the first round. But I found the court here much slower and I just couldn't get my timing.

"Obviously she's a good player — but that must be the worst match I have ever played. It is very disappointing since it was a match I shouldn't have lost."

Loit, who first attracted attention when she took a set off Spain's former Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez at the French Open last year, had never beaten a top-100 player before.

"Just getting into the main draw from the qualifying was an exploit in itself. It is fabulous to have got into the second round and to have beaten a player as good as Maleeva," she said.

In the qualifying tournament Loit defeated Britain's Samantha Smith and Karen Cross and compatriot Amelie Cocheteux. Earlier this month she won her first event since joining up with French Fed Cup coach Loic Courteau and fitness trainer Frederic Roche by triumphing at the Dinan clay-court Challenge.

She now plays compatriot and fourth-seed Nathalie Tauziat on Wednesday for a place in the quarter-finals.

Russian teenager Anna Kournikova, who just missed being seeded, swept past French wild card opponent Alexia Dechaume-Balleret 6-3, 7-5.

The 16-year-old, a 1997 Wimbledon semi-finalist who has risen to 27th in the rankings despite being restricted on the number of tournaments she can play because of her age, went off the boil at the start of the second set when she trailed 0-2 and 3-5. But she fought her way back with some lethal passing shots and saved three set points.

Kournikova, whose two defeats in 1998 have been inflicted by the world's top-ranked players Martina Hingis and Linday Davenport, now faces either last year's finalist and fifth-seeded Anke Huber of Germany or another French wild card player Alexandra Fusai.

Battling 21-year-old 'lucky-loser' Sarah Pitkowski notched up a surprise win when she defeated 18-year-old left-handed French compatriot Anne Gaelle Sidot.

The red-haired Pitkowski, who has risen to 60th in the rankings since she started using a longer racket, ran down everything Sidot sent down to score a 6-4, 6-0 win and said that the success of top French players and France's Fed Cup victory last year was proving to be an inspiration to other home players.

The player from Lille, who came into the tournament when former World No. 1 Steffi Graf had to curtail her latest comeback attempt after straining a calf muscle on Sunday, admitted that she had nevertheless found it difficult adapting to the ultra slow surface.

"You seem to stick to it," she said, adding: "And when you stamp your feet it sounds terribly loud."

She didn't have to stamp her feet too much Tuesday — especially when Sidot clearly lost her concentration in the second set — to reach a second-round clash against eighth-seed Sabine Appelmans of Belgium.

Appelmans, a quarter-finalist in the tournament in 1994 and 1995, earlier scored her first win of 1998 when she beat Latvian qualifier Larisa Neiland.

The popular 24th-ranked Belgian left-hander, beaten in the first-round at both Sydney and the Australian Open this year, completed an easy 6-1, 6-3 victory.

Earlier, Appelman's sixth-seeded compatriot Dominique Van Roost finished with a flourish after dropping the second set to beat Barbara Schett of Austria 6-2, 4-6, 6-0. And Schett's seventh-seeded compatriot Barbara Paulus saw off Czech opponent Sandra Kleinova 6-3, 7-5.

Paulus now faces Silvia Farina of Italy who recovered from a shaky start to beat Denisa Chladkova of the Czech Republic 2-6, 6-2, 6-3.

JTTF names national team players to compete in Qatar tourney

By Omar Karmi
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Four Jordanian table tennis players are currently preparing to take part in the 4th International Qatar Table Tennis Competition which will be held in Doha Feb. 23-27.

Iyad Maknay, Mustafa Rida, Tatyana Najjar and Alia Tufaha were chosen to participate in the Pro Tour event.

Some 20 other countries will be taking part, amongst them the strongest in the world, China, Sweden and Korea.

Although Jordan, currently ranked 67th and 91st in the world men and women's rankings respectively, are not hoping for great results, it will nevertheless, according to the President of the Jordanian Table Tennis Federation (JTTF), Dr. Ismat Al Kurdi "provide valuable top-level match experience for the players."

The Federation assembled the Kingdom's best eight men and six women for 2 weeks during January to determine who would go.

The rankings were decided upon after several round-robin tournaments, in which each player played the other twice, and the total points were added up at the end.

A win is worth two points; in the event that two players are equal on points, their matches with each other are brought into the equation, and the player taking the most points off the other is ranked higher.

In the men's draw, Iyad Maknay topped the men through such calculation where four men shared points. Ayman Maknay and Shawqi Dia just missed out.

In the women's half, Tatyana Naser reigned supreme with maximum points, leaving Alia Tufaha a distant second. Lina Majdalawi and Zeina Shaban just missed out.

Shaban has, at the tender age of nine, played herself onto the national team, and will henceforth be participating in the team's practices. She is preparing to go, independently of the JTTF, but with their blessing, to the Safir's International Table Tennis Tournament in Sweden, renowned for featuring some of the best players in Europe, where she will be competing in the Under-10's, Under-11's, Under-12's and Under-13's championships.

Blazers upset Lakers

PORTLAND — In Portland, Oregon, Isaiah Rider scored 16 of his 24 points in the third quarter as the Portland Trail Blazers built a 31-point fourth-quarter lead and held on to beat the Los Angeles Lakers.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 31 points for the Lakers.

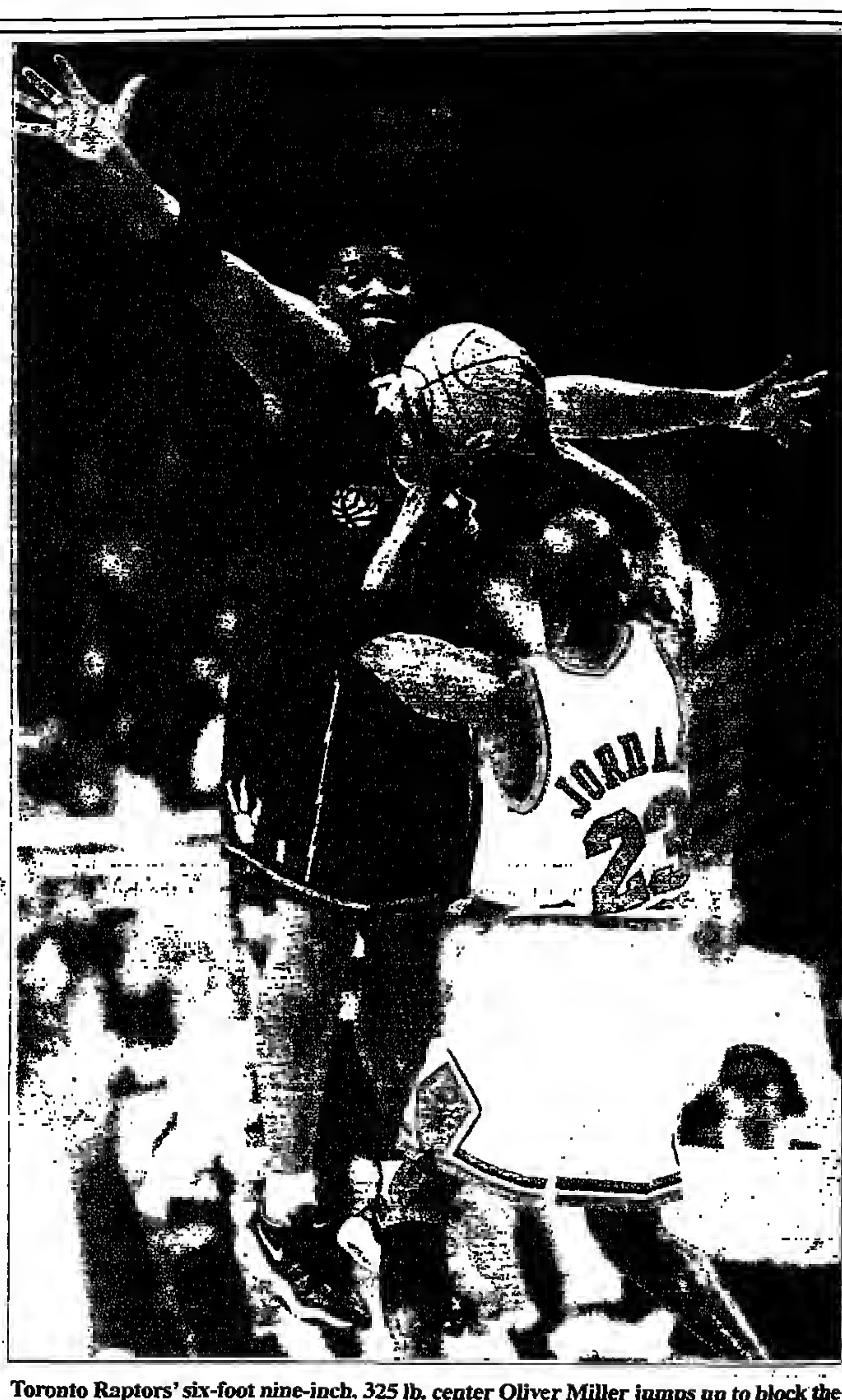
Kobe Bryant, voted to start the All-Star game despite coming off the bench for the Lakers all season, got his first start for Los Angeles and scored 15 points.

• **Wizards 99, Warriors 87:** In Oakland, California, Tracy Murray scored a career-high 50 points to help the Washington Wizards overcome the absence of its top two scorers.

Murray's points were the most by an NBA player this season, one more than the 49 by Michael Jordan in a double-overtime game against the Los Angeles Clippers on Nov. 21 and by Boston's Antoine Walker against Washington on Jan. 7.

Murray, normally Washington's sixth man, finished 18-for-29 from the field, including five 3-pointers. He also made nine of 10 free throws.

Joe Smith's season-high 36 points led Golden State, which lost its 10th straight at home. Washington played without Chris Webber and Juwan Howard, who are injured.



Toronto Raptors' six-foot nine-inch, 325 lb. center Oliver Miller jumps up to block the path of Chicago Bulls' Michael Jordan during second quarter action in Chicago (Reuters photo)

African Nations Cup

Make or break for struggling Tunisia

OUAGADOUGOU (AFP) — Highly-rated Ghana and outsiders Democratic Republic of Congo can clinch African Nations Cup quarter-finals places by winning Group B matches here on Thursday.

The Congolese face Tunisia at the Municipal Stadium during the afternoon while Ghana and Togo will relish the cooler evening conditions when they meet at the August 4 Stadium.

Ghana, champions a record four times and among the title favourites here, and 1996 runners-up Tunisia were expected to encounter little difficulty from poorly-prepared Congo and off-form Togo.

These predictions could still come true in the sweltering Burkina Faso capital although the pressure is on the Tunisians, who cannot afford another lacklustre performance after falling 2-0 to Ghana on Monday.

Congo, helped by two controversial decisions from Moroccan referee Said Belgoba, defeated Togo 2-1 through a couple of penalties converted by Belgian-based striker Tondelua Mbuilua.

The first spot kick was harshly awarded when Togo defender Massamesso Tchangai touched the ball rather than the man and Congo goalkeeper Nkombe Tpkala escaped unpunished after handling outside his area.

Tunisian coach Henri Kaspzerczak was concerned before the biennial 16-nation cup began about the elevation of his team to a place among the favourites as the North Africans often do better when written off.

A usually tight defence was ripped apart by the speed and skill of Ghana, and the result could have been even worse had Mohamed Gargo not struck a penalty kick so tamely that Ali Boumnijel blocked it.

Only shaven-haired Hassan Gabsi on the right wing impressed in attack for Tunisia with Mehdi Ben Slimane and veteran Ziad Tlemcani an ineffective strike force.

Ghana, superbly led by inventive midfielder Abedi 'Pele' Ayew, were the most impressive of the 16 teams in the opening games and Togo goalkeeper Wake Nibombe, who plays for Ghanaian club Goldfields, must fear the worst.

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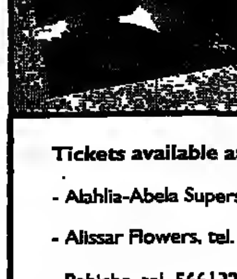

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SPORTS IN BRIEF

Majorca reach last-four

MADRID (AFP) — A 68th minute goal from Yugoslav striker Jovan Stankovic gave Majorca a 1-0 victory over Athletic Bilbao on Tuesday and put the home side into the semi-finals of the Spanish Cup competition for the first time since 1981. The first-leg of the quarter-final clash had ended in a 2-1 Bilbao victory, but although the aggregate score was 2-2, Majorca went through on the away-goals rule. For over an hour it looked as though Bilbao would weather the storm — their defenders staying rock solid in the face on non-stop Majorca attacks. But Stankovic, who finally managed to get round Julen Guerrero, unleashed a tremendous drive from 25 metres which slammed into the back of the net after being deflected by a Bilbao defender. It left goalkeeper Imanol Etxeberria no chance. Luis Fernandez' side immediately threw everybody forward and they might well have saved the night when midfield powerhouse Inigo Larrainzar let loose a powerful drive which nearly had the home side's Argentinian goalkeeper Roa beaten. The other Spanish Cup quarter-final return-leg clashes will be played on Wednesday and Thursday.

Laudrup wants to play Gullit way

LONDON (AFP) — Danish star Brian Laudrup, who is set to leave Scottish champions Glasgow Rangers at the end of the season, said here on Wednesday that he was keen to play for Chelsea coach and Dutch master Ruud Gullit. The 28-year-old winger, formerly at Serie A side Fiorentina, said although flattered by overtures from Dutch giants Ajax Amsterdam he was not interested in playing for the same club side as his elder brother Michael. "I am very interested in the way Ruud Gullit wants to utilise me and how he wants the team to play," Laudrup junior said. "I believe my style of play would be more suited to Chelsea," he added. The twice-crowned Scottish player of the year had been a target of Manchester United and Ajax before the start of this season but he agreed to stay on at Rangers for another season as they chase a record 10th successive championship. Laudrup joined Rangers four years ago after playing for a succession of top clubs — Bayern Munich, Fiorentina and AC Milan — and has become a firm favourite with the fans.

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Germans lead medal table; Street takes gold

NAGANO (AP) — Snowboarding, the newest Olympic sport, produced the first scandal of the Nagano Games on Wednesday. Masahiko Harada had more agony on the ski jump hill and Picabo Street produced a story of hope on the Alpine slopes.

Canada's giant slalom winner Ross Rebagliati was stripped of gold after a doping test detected marijuana, giving snowboarding the wrong kind of exposure during its inaugural Olympics (see separate story).

On the slopes, the weather finally relented and U.S. veteran Picabo Street completed a heartwarming recovery from injury, winning the women's Super-G, the first Alpine medal, by a mere .01 of a second over Austria's Michaela Dorfmeister.

Even that seemed an ocean of time compared to women's luge, where Silke Kraushaar edged German teammate Barbara Niedernhueber by .002 seconds, one of the closest finishes in Olympic history.

Germany went even better in the 3,000 speedskating with Gunda Niemann-Stirnemann leading a sweep of medals.

Germany took a big jump in the medals table and led with 11 overall, including three gold. Russia was in second place with 5 medals, two gold.

Harada could have boosted Japan into third place, but he again turned his final leap toward victory into agony. He gave up gold by landing short in the 90-metre competition, much like he had done in the team event four years ago in Lillehammer.

Instead, Finland lived up to tradition when Jani Soininen clinched the gold to move his nation into third place in the medals' table with four.

Japan earned its second winter gold anyhow when unheralded freestyle skier Tae Satoya won the women's moguls, making up for the disappointment that produced only a silver in ski jumping.

"I'm incredibly happy. I still can't believe it," said the 21-year-old Satoya.

Her victory, on Japan's foundation day holiday, also marked the first time her nation ever has won more than one gold medal in a winter Olympics.

In men's moguls freestyle, Jonny Moseley bumped and jumped his way to the gold for the first medal of the games for the United States.

Street quickly added a second, coming back from injury to win gold in the women's Super-G, ahead of Austrians Dorfmeister and Alexandra Meissnitzer.

"I don't believe what I'm seeing," she exclaimed after she capped one long season of misery with gold. A year went by recovering from surgery on her left knee and two weeks ago she had an ugly crash in a downhill, still giving her headaches in Nagano.

Harada had headaches of another sort to take care of. He gave away a comfortable lead on the final jump of the competition and slumped out of the medals.

An eery hush fell over the crowd of 65,000, which included Crown Prince Naruhito, when Harada almost lost his balance in near-perfect, windless conditions and landed short.

Just one day earlier Harada had virtually guaranteed Japanese gold on home ground.

"Maybe I became nervous," Harada said, after dropping to fifth position.

Kazuyoshi Funaki partially atoned for Harada by taking silver, ahead of Austria's Andreas Widhoelzl.

There was no atoning for Rebagliati. The 26-year-old from Whistler, British Columbia, had been celebrated as a national hero after his triumph Sunday. But the Canadian was asked to return the gold medal after a post-race test showed traces of marijuana in his urine.

Thomas Prugger of Italy, who finished second, is expected to inherit the title if a Canadian appeal fails. The committee for the arbitration of sport will now review the case and must rule within 24 hours. I has overturned drug cases before.

"I've been trying for 11 years to be the best snowboarder in the world. ... I've worked too hard to let this slip through my fingers," Rebagliati said.

In the men's moguls, Moseley, 22, bounced through the bumps like a pinball and performed his signature "air" move: a 360 mute grab jump in which he did a full "helicopter" rotation and grabbed his inside ski.

The silver and bronze medals went to Finland, with Janne Lahtela finishing second ahead of Sami Mustonen, capping a great day for the Scandinavian nation.

The Japanese surprise Wednesday was Satoya, 21, who had never won any major championship in moguls. She was only 11th after the qualifying, but she put down a sizzling run in the final to win ahead of Germany's Tatjana Mittermayer and Norway's Kari Traa.

Japan now has two medals, including another gold by speedskater Hiroyasu Shimizu, who set an Olympic record in the 500 meters on his way to gold late Tuesday.

But it was Germany that made the biggest move Wednesday.

Four years after a disastrous performance at Lillehammer, Neimann-Stirnemann won the gold medal with an Olympic record in the 3,000 metres.

She finished in 4 minutes, 7.29 seconds, beating Claudia Pechstein by 1:18. Anna Friesinger made it a clean sweep for the Germans.

Norway's Halvard Hanevold scored a surprise victory in the men's 20-kilometre biathlon, edging out Italy's veteran Pier Alberto Carrara. Aleksei Aidarov of Belarus took the bronze.

Picabo Street of the United States skis un her way to winning the gold medal in the women's Olympic super-G race in Hakuba February 11. Picabo Street won the gold medal abead of Austria's silver medallist Michaela Dorfmeister (Reuters photo)

American Jonny Moseley enjoys a first touch of his gold medal as he listens to the national anthem during the medal awarding ceremony. Janne Lahtera of Finland won the silver with the bronze going to his teammate Sami Mustonen (Reuters photo)

China's Xiuqing Yang (L) scores a goal and hits Japanese goalie Yuka Oda on the helmet during a women's preliminary icehockey match at the XVIII Winter Olympic Games at the Aqua Wing Stadium (Reuters photo)

Snowboarder stripped of Olympic gold over drug failure

NAGANO (AFP) — Ross Rebagliati of Canada was stripped of his Nagano Olympics snowboard title Wednesday after failing a drug test, but claimed he is the victim of passive marijuana smoking.

The International Olympic Comminee ordered the giant slalom gold medal — the first-ever awarded for snowboarding at an Olympics — to be taken back and Rebagliati expelled from the Nagano Winter Games.

But the Canadian Olympic Association (COA) launched an immediate appeal on behalf of the 26-year-old winner of last Sunday's race. The hearing before the Court of Arbitration in Sport started Wednesday night and a result is expected Thursday.

Rebagliati was "devastated" by the failure, his team said. His position was made more complicated after Japanese police said they also wanted to question him.

Rebagliati told Canadian officials he last took marijuana in April 1997, but gave up as part of his quest for Olympic gold. He admitted though that virtually everyone around him smokes the drug.

COA chief executive Carol-Ann Letheren expressed "complete and absolute discontent" with the IOC decision to make Rebagliati the first athlete to be stripped of an Olympic title since Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson in 1988.

Rebagliati tested positive for 17.8 nanogrammes of marijuana per millilitre. The International Ski Federation (FIS) has a limit of 15 nanogrammes.

Two IOC votes over Rebagliati's case were both passed by majorities of one. IOC Secretary General Francois Carrard admitted it had been an "unusually close decision."

The IOC medical commission voted by 13 votes to 12 to recommend sanctions. The excutive board voted 3-2, with two abstentions, to strip Rebagliati of the gold.

The COA believes a severe reprimand would have been enough, Lethern said. Canadian experts were gathering evidence to show that cannabis was not performance-enhancing and that it could get into the system without being smoked.

Canadian Snowboard Federation (CSF) executive director Michael Wood said in a statement that Rebagliati "has stated to the CSF, CAO and the IOC that be has not been involved in the use of marijuana since April 1997.

"We are appealling this to the fullest of our abilities and we will stand with Ross to ensure that he is provided with the utmost support."

Later Wood added that Rebagliati had been frank with the national Olympic committee about his connection with drugs.

"Last night, he told me straight up that everyone be knows and associates with is a user," said Wood, who is also the Canadian snowboarding team leader in Nagano.

Wood said virtually everyone in the house that Rebagliati lived in used marijuana. The snowboarder had last been in contact with them at a party in his home town of Whistler, British Columbia on January 31, the day before leaving for the Olympics.

Snowboarding is making its Olympic debut in Nagano and bas developed a rebellious reputation. But Wood said drug taking was no more common in snowboarding than any other sport.

"I would not say that every other snowboarder is puffing away on a joint," he claimed.

At his winner's press conference Rebagliati admitted soft drugs could be a problem for the sport but denied he took them.

According to the COA, Rebagliati had drug tests last September and December. Both were negative but did detect small traces of marijuana.

Wood read out a statment from Rebagliati at a press conference.

"I have been training for 11 years to be the best snowboarder in the world and that goal was achieved on February 8 in Shiga Kogen.

"I have worked too hard to let that slip through my fingers. I am in favour of the decision to appeal the IOC executive board decision and will be working with the Canadian Olympic Association to prepare that appeal."

Japanese police said they wanted Rebagliati for questioning. Japan has strict laws on drug possession and has previously banned Argentine soccer player Diego Maradona from entering the country because of his cocaine use. But the IOC director general said there was no evidence that the marijuana had been consumed on Japanese territory.

There bave been only six doping cases in Winter Olympic history and the last offender was Polish hockey player Jaroslaw Marawiecki at the 1988 Calgary Games.

Ben Johnson, the former 100m world record holder was sent home in disgrace after testing positive for anabolic steroids after winning the sprint at the 1988 Seoul Games.

Rios pays heavy price; Becker downs Henman

DUBAI (AFP) — Second seed Marcelo Rios paid a heavy price for an act of forgetfulness as he fell to a shock opening round defeat at the Dubai Open on Tuesday.

Two-time French Open champion Sergi Bruguera was also beaten, but top seed Jonas Bjorkman advanced in straight sets and Boris Becker demonstrated that he is still a major threat in the twilight of his career as he overwhelmed Tim Henman in convincing fashion.

Rios, who returned to his Florida base after contesting the Australian Open final, forgot his passport when he set off for Dubai on Friday night, and was forced to take a Sunday flight instead.

He arrived in Dubai on Monday night, and looked listless as be was beaten 6-3, 6-3 by New Zealander Brett Steven.

"I thought I had a great draw, but I was tired and hadn't practised, and that's it," said the Chilean. "Maybe I should have come here straight from Australia, but I didn't."

Becker produced a stunning performance to defeat Henman 7-5, 6-0, and dropped just three points in his last seven service games, two of them in the final game. His superbly-timed returns and Henman's tendency to net too many volleys allowed Becker to sew the match up in just 67 minutes.

"I have felt over the past couple of weeks that my timing is excellent and physically I'm in good shape. I knew he wasn't playing his best and so I had a chance," said Becker.

Although his form clearly indicates he is still capable of winning a Grand Slam, Becker insists he will restrict himself to just 10 or 12 tournaments this year. But if he continues to perform at such a high level he is prepared to extend his playing career into 1999.

"I don't want to travel 11 months a year any more. There comes a time when family is more important," said Becker. "My aim now is to truly enjoy my tennis and go to places I haven't been before, and when the opportunity arises play like I did tonight."

Fifth-seeded Bruguera slumped to a 6-3, 6-3 defeat by American Jeff Tarango, with his listless performance making him look as if he had just run a marathon rather than resting for three weeks following his retirement from the first round of the Australian Open. But Tarango claimed credit for that.

"I tried to keep the points short," said the American; "because be bas to hit three or four balls before he gets into a point."

Bruguera admitted he had been burried into errors, but blamed the court rather than his opponent.

"The court was very fast and I didn't bave time to prepare my shots," he said. "It was difficult to get into the points and they were over before I got started."

Swedish ace Bjorkman eased to a 6-1, 6-3 win over qualifier David Nainkin of South Africa, while fourth-seeded Alex Corretja overcame fellow Spaniard Julian Alonso 6-1, 6-2.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH

ANSWERS TO WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - East-West vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠A 10 6 3 ♡Q 10 ◇8 5 4 ♣A 9 5 2

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
Pass	3♠	Dbl	Pass
?			

What action do you take?

A - Don't even think of converting to penalties — there is no reason to think you can defeat three clubs. You have a known spade fit and, since partner is expecting only some 6-8 points from you, you must show your hand is better than that by jumping to four spades.

Q. 2 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠K 4 ♡9 ◇A K 4 ♣Q 9 8 6 5 4 3 2

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♠	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
?			

What action do you take?

A - If you still think you have a minimum, think again. The fact that partner did not bid no trump suggests that North does not have values in hearts but has a fair hand. In that case, five clubs must have good play, so why not bid it?

Q. 3 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠A K 7 4 ♡A 9 4 ◇6 4 ♣A K J 9

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♡	Pass	?	

What do you respond?

A - It is tempting to jump shift to two spades, but you can't be sure where the hand should be played and might need room to explore. Because of that, we slightly prefer one spade.

Q. 4 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠A 10 4 ♡A 10 8 3 ◇A Q 10 2 ♣9 2

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♠	4♠	?	

What do you bid now?

A - The preempt has achieved its purpose! You have a pretty good hand but with the death holding, a doubleton, in preemptor's suit, there is no safe way to explore. Bid four spades — admittedly an underbid.

Q. 5 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠Q 7 6 3 2 ♡A 9 8 6 4 3 ◇Void ♣K Q

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1◇	Pass	1♡	Pass
2♠	Pass	?	

What do you bid now?

A - This looks like a misfit, so we would proceed carefully. Since a bid of two spades would create a game force, we would opt for an underbid of two hearts to see how partner reacts.

Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠A K 7 4 3 ♡4 ◇J 8 3 ♣A Q 9 5

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♠	Pass	2◇	Pass
7			

What do you bid now?

A - Since three clubs would be a high reverse and the hand is a whit weak for that action, the choice lies between a diamond raise or a rebid of two spades. Since we don't like raising a minor with a weak three-card holding, we would opt for two spades.

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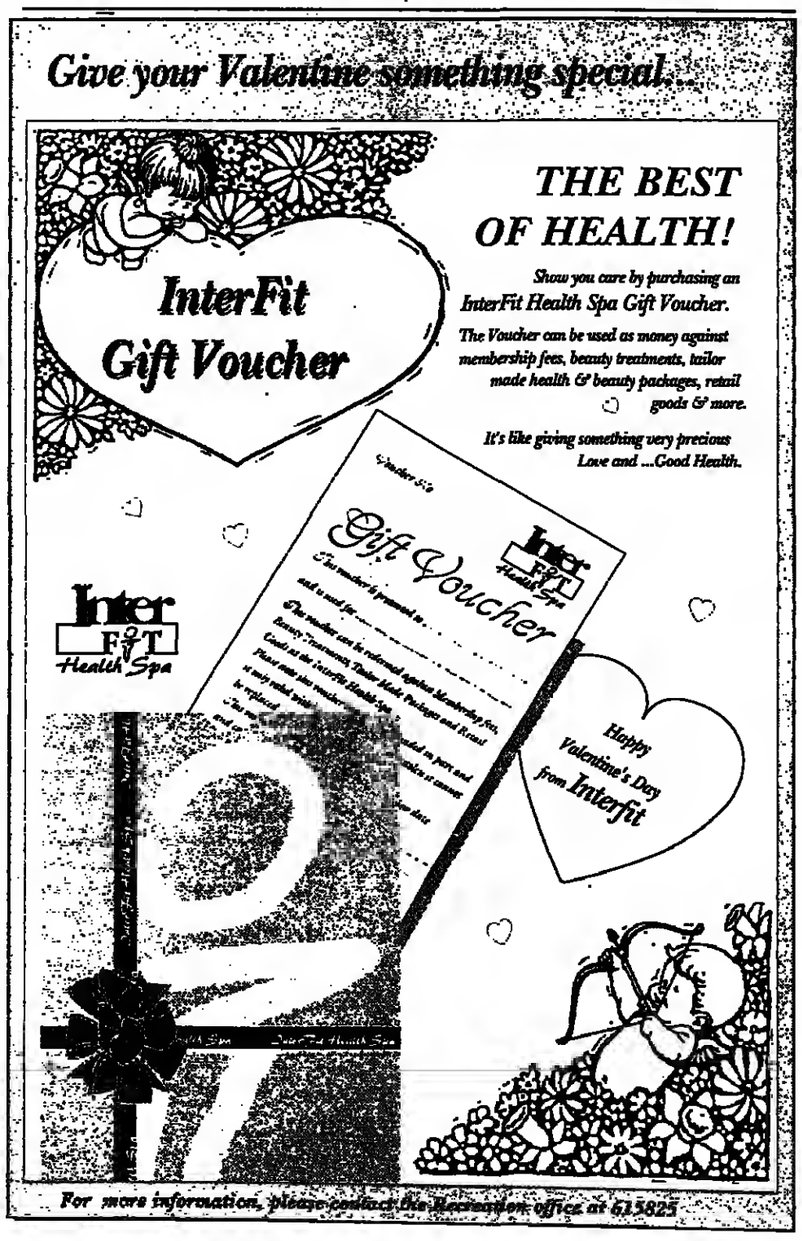

For more information, please contact the Reception office at 615825

Russian deputies' aid plane arrives in Baghdad

YEREVAN (AFP) — A Russian plane loaded with humanitarian aid and cbartered by Russian nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky arrived in Baghdad Wednesday after a three-day delay to wait for U.N. authorisatioo.

The plane had been stranded at Yerevan airport following U.S. moves to block the flight to sanctions-hit Iraq.

Mr. Zhirinovsky hit the headlines again Wednesday, striking the Russian amhassador to Armenia in the face Wednesday in a row over his much-delayed flight to Baghdad.

The leader of the extreme nationalist Liberal Democratic Party lost his cool after being stranded in the Armenian capital Yerevan since Sunday awaiting U.N. clearance for the flight to the Iraqi capital, journalists said.

Zhirinovsky strikes Russian envoy

The incident occurred when Mr. Zhirinovsky tried to get 50 people aboard the plane carrying aid supplies to Iraq, instead of the 30 authorised late Tuesday by the U.N. Sanctions Committee.

"When the Russian ambassador [Andrei Urnov] tried patiently to coovince him to give up the attempt, he [Zhirinovsky] insulted him," a journalist from Russia's RTR television said.

"And when the amhassador puhlicly rebuked him, Zhirinovsky struck him in the face," the journalist said, adding that journalists who filmed the exchange had their film confiscated.

The plane tonk off Wednesday for Baghdad with Mr. Zhirinovsky, arouod a dozeo Russian lawmakers and 15 Russian journalists.

The incident is oot the first time Mr. Zhirinovsky has come to blows with those who have stood in his path.

The voluble party leader struck a woman deputy during a parliamentary session, threw a flower pot at journalists in the French city of Strasbourg, and hurled a glass of orange juice at Boris Nemtsov during a televised debate, before the young reformer Mr. Nemtsov became a first deputy prime minister.

Russia urges Turkey not to let U.S. use airbase against Iraq

ANKARA (AFP) — Russia on Wednesday called on Turkey not to allow the United States to use an allied airbase in Turkish territory for possible air strikes against Iraq.

"Russia appreciates the Turkish position which is in favour of political and diplomatic methods in finding a solution to the Iraqi crisis," the Russian ambassador in Ankara, Vadim Kuznetsov, said in an interview with AFP.

"We hope Turkey will maintain this position and continue to abstain from allowing its territory to be used for any unilateral use of force against Iraq without proper decisions of the U.N. Security Council," Mr. Kuznetsov said.

A U.S.-led multinational force made extensive use of the Incirlik airbase in southern Turkey in striking Iraqi targets during the 1991 Gulf war.

But in the latest crisis, Turkish officials have voiced reluctance at letting the U.S. again use Incirlik for offensive purposes against Iraq.

Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz has said that if the United States formally requests Incirlik's use against Iraq, it would be up to the Turkish parliament to decide on the matter.

Foreign Minister Ismail Cem met Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad last week and asked for Baghdad's full compliance with U.N. resolutions on weapons inspections.

In Baghdad, Mr. Cem also held talks with an envoy of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who is spearheading efforts for a peaceful solution to the crisis.

President Yeltsin said Tuesday during a visit to Rome that Russia would send a "very strong" message to Mr. Hussein demanding he comply with the U.N. resolutions.

Mr. Kuznetsov said President Hussein has recently been showing signs of compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions on U.N. inspections of Baghdad's weapons of mass destruction.

"The United Nations should deal with Iraq not only on weapons inspections, but also on the lifting of the sanctions" once the Iraqi leader complies with the resolutions, he said.

Turkey, which says its economy was badly hit due to severed trade with Iraq after the Gulf war, also favours the lifting of the U.N. sanctions on Baghdad as soon as possible.

"The positions of Russia and Turkey are quite close on this crisis and we are in constant contact, informing each other of initiatives and evaluations," Mr. Kuznetsov said.

Fearing that U.S. air strikes on Baghdad could cause a fresh refugee influx toward its border, Turkey is preparing to take measures inside neighbouring northern Iraq, according to government officials.

More than 500,000 Iraqi Kurds massed near the Turkish border in fear of retaliation by Baghdad troops following a failed Kurdish rebellion in the wake of the Gulf war.

The Turkish government, which fears the exodus might be repeated, could set up tent cities and distribute intensive humanitarian aid in the military's coordination inside Iraq in the event of a refugee influx, sources said.

Some media reports that thousands of Turkish troops have already entered northern Iraq in a fresh incursion have been denied by Turkish officials.

However, Turkey, which has made frequent incursions into northern Iraq to fight separatist Kurds in recent years, is already believed to be keeping around 5,000 troops there since the latest operation in September and October.

Protesters burn U.S., Israeli flags in Baghdad

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Some 100 protesters from various Muslim countries burned the U.S. and Israeli flags here Wednesday in a sign of solidarity with Iraq in its standoff with the United Nations over disarmament.

The demonstrators, who protested in front of the U.N. office in downtown Baghdad, also called for a holy war against the United States and Britain.

The protest was organised by the International Islamic Peoples' Congress, a forum created by Iraq in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, and which has been meeting here since Monday.

"A holy war against the United States and Britain has become the duty of every Muslim," said Nader Assaad Bayudh Al Tamimi, spokesman of the Palestinian group Islamic Jihad Beit Al Maqdas, who participated in the demonstration.

"Their interests must be attacked, whether someone using a bomb does it or someone using a stone, because there must be no silence in the face of injustice," he said.

The United States and Britain have threatened to use force against Iraq if Baghdad does not give U.N. arms inspectors unconditional access to all its suspected weapons sites.

Iraq has beeo under U.N. sanctions since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, with their lifting tied to inspectors confirming Baghdad has no weapons of mass destruction.

PNA bans pro-Iraq demos

NABLUS (AFP) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) forced the cancellation Wednesday of pro-Iraq rallies in the West Bank after Israel issued sharp protests over the demonstrations.

Azmi Ashurhi, the head of the committee organising pro-Iraq demonstrations in the West Bank, said "all rallies in Palestinian areas have been cancelled to avoid any possible embarrassment to the Palestinian Authority."

The decision led to the cancellation of one rally planned for Wednesday in Hebron and a second scheduled for Thursday in Nablus.

"We were informed by the governor's office that the demonstration had been prohibited," said Shaher Saad, one of the organisers of Thursday's rally in Nablus.

Israel issued sharp protests to the PNA after a series of pro-Iraq rallies in recent days during which demonstrators burned U.S. and Israeli flags and called on Iraq to attack Israel.

Israeli press reports said the United States had also protested over the demonstrations, which came as Washington was seeking the support of Arab and other governments for the use of military strikes against Iraq.

There was no Palestinian confirmation of any U.S. pressure.

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and other officials charged that the rallies were organised with at least the tacit support of the PNA.

Mr. Netanyahu said Tuesday night that the pro-Iraq demonstrations called into question the Palestinians' desire for peace with Israel.

The chief of the Palestinian police, General Ghazi Jabali, said on Monday that permits would be refused for any demonstrations "that lead to violence and disturbances."

"Anybody who wants to organise a demonstration has to have a permit, which will be issued on condition that there will not be any flag burning and that protesters will stay away from Israeli roadblocks and oot damage public property," he told AFP.

In the Gaza Strip, however, a pro-Iraq group said it would go ahead with three indoor meetings in support of Iraq scheduled for Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Mr. Netanyahu met with several of his ministers Wednesday to discuss Israeli fears that Palestinian activists could riot in the event that the United States carries out threats to lead air strikes against Iraq in the conflict over U.N. weapons inspections, Israel Radio reported.

Garaudy says support growing

DUBAI (R) — Roger Garaudy, the French Muslim writer on trial in a Paris court for trivialising the World War II Holocaust against Jews, said on Wednesday that support for his cause extended beyond the Islamic World.

"There has been wide support among Arab and Muslim nations... I have also been invited to visit Chile and Kerala in India, which means we are going beyond the Muslim World," he said.

The French intellectual was speaking at a news conference during a visit to the United Arab Emirates, one of several countries in the Middle East where there has been a public show of support for him.

Mr. Garaudy, 84, who denies any wrongdoing, was brought to trial after several anti-racism groups accused him of denying crimes committed against humanity, itself a crime under French law, in his book "The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics."

He has argued that Hitler's killing of the Jews amounted to "pogroms" or "massacres" but that it was an exaggeration to call the Nazi crimes "genocide" or "Holocaust."

Barak ready for Palestinian state

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli opposition chief Ehud Barak said on Wednesday he would accept a Palestinian state within security limits agreed upon by Israel and the Palestinians.

"If they decide that they will have a Palestinian state, they will bave a Palestinian state. It's up to them. It's oot Netanyahu's problem. It's not my problem. It's their problem," the Labour Party chairman told American Jewish leaders.

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu's rightist Likud Party rejects the establishment of a Palestinian state in West Bank and Gaza Strip lands occupied hy Israel in the 1967 Middle East war. Labour's platform neither embraces nor rejects the concept.

"If they want a Palestinian state, they will have it. The only limitatioo is that they should build it beyond the borders agreed upon and within security limitations agreed upon," Mr. Barak said when asked his vision of a Palestinian entity.

"If we cannot go ahead with physical separation, we will eod up with renewal of terrorism under tougher circumstances and with a Belfast or Bosnia type of situatioo bere," said Mr. Barak, who took over Labour from Nobel laureate Shimon Peres in June.

Mr. Barak, a former army chief who was foreign minister under former Israeli Prime Minister Peres in 1995-96, said Mr. Netanyahu's policies could lead to a disaster worse than anything before Israel's groundbreaking peace moves with Palestinians in Madrid and Oslo in 1991 and 1993.

Mr. Barak said he believed a nearly year-long deadlock in peacemaking talks between Mr. Netanyahu and the Palestinians was leading towards war.

"We are heading towards war. We are heading toward a major disaster. By beading the peace process into a deadlock, we woo't just step back to square ooe of Oslo, Madrid. We might be thrown back a generatioo with a major eruption of violence," he said.

THE ANCIENT HEAD: The head of Amenophis III, an Egyptian pharaoh from 1425 B.C. dominates an exhibition organised by the British Museum in Bombay Wednesday. The exhibition, which opens to the public today features 332 ancient artifacts from Greece, India, Egypt, Japan and the Sumerian civilisation and has cost about one million British pounds to display. The exhibition is an Indo-British project organised to commemorate fifty years of Indian independence from British rule (Reuters photo)

Algeria steps up attack on fraud, officials jailed

ALGIERS (R) — Algeria on Wednesday announced it was stepping up its war on corruption and fraud, and gave details of senior officials being sent to jail or awaiting trial.

"The fight against corruption... is going to accelerate and the fallout in the medium term can only be beneficial for the country's economy," said the government newspaper Al Moudjahid.

Many of the country's 29 million people have blamed corruption and the apparent impunity of officials for a lack of confidence in the government and state institutions.

Coinciding with the newspaper statement, the official news agency APS reported a range of jail sentences imposed on accountants, government and other senior officials.

In one, a court in Bouira, southeast of Algiers, jailed an accountant for 10 years for embezzlement at an apprentice training centre.

In Mostaganem, in the northwest, the director of the state refrigeration company was jailed for seven years, and two other officials for four years and 18 months respectively. They were all found guilty of fraud and corruption.

APS detailed other sentences ranging from 12 months to six years handed out to officials for embezzlement, and orders to detain several other senior officials in custody to await trial.

Al Moudjahid said "there is a strong political will to attack head-on this scourge which is a gangrene in society, in companies, administrations, whose authors...act with total impunity..."

The comment followed a statement on state-run television on Tuesday that Prime Minister Aimad Ouyahia had sent instructions for a crackdown to the ministers of justice, finance, the interior and trade.

10 dead in Algeria attack

ALGIERS, (AFP) — Ten people were killed and three wounded Wednesday in an attack at Telagh, near Sidi Bel Abbes in western Algeria, the security services said.

The victims were riding a vehicle when they came under attack from an armed group, they said, adding that efforts were under way to track down the gunmen.

Sidi Bel Abbes is 65 kilometres inland from the Algeria's main western port city of Oran, oo a main road leading to Morocco.

Local newspapers had reported earlier that seveo Islamists had been killed by security forces while two civilians have been murdered in the past few days.

Seven Islamists have been killed by security forces while two civilians have been murdered in the past few days, Algerian papers reported on Wednesday.

Five armed Islamists were killed oo Tuesday at Tizi Ouzou and Boumerdes, east of Algiers, the daily Liberte reported.

Two more were killed oo Sunday near Bentalha, in the southeast outskirts of the capital, the daily Al Khabar said.

The paper also reported that a veteran of the independence war had been shot dead on Tuesday near his home in Tebessa.

Iran president pledges rule of law on revolution anniversary

TEHRAN (AFP) — Tens of thousands of people took to the streets here Wednesday, braving cold and heavy snow, to celebrate the 19th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution and hear President Mohammad Khatami pledge the rule of law.

Mr. Khatami, in an unusually brief speech in Tehran's Azadi (Freedom) Square, where the crowd converged, also voiced his loyalty to the principles of the 1979 revolution which toppled the pro-American shah.

"The revolution opened a new door to our people who had suffered from 150 years of despotic rule and colonialism," he said. "The presence of people on such a cold and snowy day is a sign of your enthusiasm for the revolution."

He did not directly refer to the United States, but scorned that country's efforts to pressure the Islamic Republic through sanctions.

"It is because of your political presence that we have been able to withstand all the pressure and make the enemy admit today that all its sanctions were ineffective," he said as some in the crowd shouted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel."

Mr. Khatami later briefly marched with the crowd, a habit which has become his hallmark as a "president of the people" since he took office in August.

A group of young people playfully set fire to an effigy of an "evil" American character, but the event led to a scuffle as an organiser began to whip the crowd with a string to keep them under control.

The crowd, including many children and babies in strollers, was in a joyful mood despite unusually heavy snow, although most of those from poor families, which make up the regime's main popular base, were under-dressed for the cold weather.

Several children playfully slipped down snow-covered slopes in the middle of the square as street peddlers displayed sandwhiches, snack and balloons for sale.

Loudspeakers blasted revolutionary songs and large portraits of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his predecessor, the founder of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, decorated the walls.

"This is a national event for us. We feel great about it," said a police conscript, who nevertheless complained about having had to stand guard in the cold weather since dawn.

There were also large groups of schoolboys and girls holding placards painted with revolutionary slogans and wearing green and red head-bands to symbolise their desire to die for Islam.

They were nevertheless in a peaceful mood and showed enthusiasm for the Western journalists present.

"I am very optimistic about our new president, because he will not divert from the path of Islam and the leader," said Rafi Feizian, a student of theology at Imam Jafar Sadeq University. "Some people may misinterpret the situation, but he wants to aim for a stronger spirituality in our country," he said. The student was referring to some Orthodox circles who fear Mr. Khatami may depart from the revolutionary line.

Yeltsin declares love for Rome, Italian women

ROME (R) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin, on a visit to Rome to promote closer ties betweeo Russia and Italy, has declared his love for Italian women. "Allow me to confess my boundless love for the capital of your country, for Italy and for Italian women," Yeltsin, who was accompanied on the three-day trip by his wife Naina, said at a state banquet hosted by Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. "During this visit I have come to understand the prophetic words of Gogol, who wrote: 'You fall in love with Rome slowly, little by little — but it lasts your whole life.'"

Trial lawyers high in testosterone

ATLANTA (R) — Trial lawyers have significantly higher levels of testosterone than those in other areas of the law, said a psychologist who has studied how the male sex hormone affects human behaviour. Professor James Dabbs said in a study to be published this month that lawyers as a group do not have especially high levels of testosterone. But trial lawyers do — about 30 per cent more than those who stay out of the courtroom. Dabbs said high levels of testosterone are associated with dominance, persistence and focused attention. The hormone is often linked in studies to antisocial behaviour and competition.

First gay rugby team formed in New Zealand

WELLINGTON (AFP) — An exclusively homosexual rugby team is being formed bere to sbow "it's okay to be gay" in the macho New Zealand rugby world, an organiser said Tuesday. "We want to show that it's okay to play rugby and be gay — and that it's okay to be gay and play rugby," said Dean Knight. "Some people in our community are uneasy about gay rugby players," he said. "They think we migbt be buying into the straight community's values. But we have a very diverse gay community. There are people who are into the macho-type rugby thing and I think we should provide for them too."

Hong Kong monks squeezed out of marketplace

HONG KONG (R) — Even Buddhist monks can fall foul of the marketplace in Hong Koog — cheap labour in the form of monks from China is taking their livelihoods away. From beating drums and reciting sutras to praying at funerals, local monks are being squeezed out by an influx of brethren who charge less, the South China Morning Post said. "It's fair that they're complaining — they have a right to," a source at the Po Lin Monastery told the newspaper. But an employee of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association said grumbling was inappropriate for monks. "Monks shouldn't complain about money," said Lee Yee-Wai.

Queen Elizabeth sacks her hairdresser

LONDON (AFP) — Queen Elizabeth II abruptly sacked her personal hair stylist after three years of loyal service, an industrial tribunal heard on Tuesday. Stylist Paul Burgess, was paid $160 a week to travel from his salon in Cheltenham to Buckingham Palace to do the queen's hair, until he was given his marching orders in July last year. Burgess's managing director, Vicky Schaverien, told the tribunal: "I was asked by the queen to tell him he was no longer needed." The hairdresser was shocked to be dismissed.